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A FEATHER IN HER CAP

BY

BARBARA WORSLEY-GOUGH

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A FEATHER IN HER CAP

CHAPTER I

"ALL this stuff about conventions!" said Michael Park, flattening his host's climbing geraniums as he leant against them. His host had gone to bed. His hostess, who had a mind above geraniums, did not care. She sat erect in a wicker chair, a cadaverous figure in the dusk, trying to read by the waning light a pamphlet entitled *The Married Woman: Her Position Reviewed.* Their daughter, Helen, who shared her father's interest in gardening and her mother's enthusiasm for women's rights, and, indeed, anyone's enthusiasm for anything at all, said mildly:

"Mind the geraniums, Michael."

"All right," said Michael, shifting his weight against the balustrade so that he crushed a clematis blossom instead: Michael was the most reasonable of beings. "Anyone would think," he continued, "that we lived in the nineteen-tens."

"I wish we did," sighed Delia Temple-Cheyne, from her corner of the terrace.

"Delia, you don't!" cried Joanna Nichols, who made a habit of incredulity. "You can't remember the nineteen-tens. You weren't even born."

Delia said: "Just. But I wish I had been grown up in them. Lovely Edwardian nonsense! I'd have revelled in it. You wore frilly muslin underclothes with little blue bows—and night-clubs were really wicked instead of being just like a tea-shop, or else abolished—and people were 'fast'—and it was improper to walk alone through the Burlington Arcade. I'd have adored it. Nowadays nothing's improper."

"Nothing ever was," remarked Mrs. Garland, without looking up from her pamphlet.

Michael recognized in this the kind of statement which generally provoked an argument in the Garland household. While usually willing, and even eager, to take part in any argument, on this occasion he wanted to complete the arrangements for his summer holiday. He returned to the point before anyone could accept Mrs. Garland's challenge.

"If we were hikers who stalked about England in fancy dress and slept in barns, nobody would think anything of it. The fact that we happen to be going to Austria by train, to stay in a hotel like Christians, may make it less picturesque but it doesn't make it more peculiar."

"That point about hiking and Christianity is quite a sound one, Michael," said Mrs. Garland, abandoning the pamphlet because she could no longer see to read it. "One has realised for a long time that it's all part of the cult of Neo-Paganism——"

Michael headed her off quickly. "I know. Youth Movements, and all that. But about Salzburg——"

"You needn't think," said Delia, interrupting him,

" that by staying in an hotel at Salzburg you'll avoid the picturesque appearance of a hiker. After a couple of days in Tyrol you'll be wearing little leather shorts and a comic-opera hat with a feather in it, and funny braces. I know you will."

" I wish you wouldn't keep on talking about the Tyrol," Michael complained. " It conveys quite the wrong atmosphere. Salzburg is technically in the Tyrol, I know, but that doesn't mean to say that we shall go all Tyrolese, and spend our time yodelling and looking for edelweiss and autumn crocuses."

" After all," said Helen, " our object is music, not mountaineering."

" My point," said Michael, persevering, " is that if none of the rest of you will start before the middle of August, then Helen and I had better go on ahead. It would be too absurd to miss about half the Music Festival simply because there are still people in the world who think that an unchaperoned holiday necessarily includes fornication."

" Of whom my husband is one," remarked Mrs. Garland, and added: " Not that that matters."

" Father won't know," said Helen.

" Of course he won't," Mrs. Garland answered seriously. " Nobody will."

Helen was occasionally embarrassed by her mother's extreme modernity of outlook. She said hastily:

" I mean, he won't know that we've gone on ahead. We won't tell him that the whole party isn't starting together."

" We won't tell him anything at all unless he asks,"

said Mrs. Garland. "And he won't ask. He'll be completely occupied for the next month or two with the new papyri at the Museum."

David Herald, curled up in the shadows by Delia's side in the far corner of the terrace, joined in the discussion for the first time.

"You'll probably find yourselves staying in the same hotel with a batch of busybodies who have known you both since childhood. That's bound to happen."

"If people want to talk, let them," replied Michael shortly.

"To the pure all things are impure," said Joanna brightly, from the balustrade.

Helen nudged Michael in the darkness. "Joanna will say things like that the whole time," she whispered. "And the worst of it is, she always believes that she thinks of them herself. I wish she weren't coming."

"Oh, I don't know," Michael whispered back. "She's all right." For the lighter moments of life Michael considered that Joanna provided a pleasing alternative to Helen's admirable earnestness.

"In any case, it won't do either of you any harm to be talked about," said Mrs. Garland. "It's a necessary social experience, and one can't have it too early."

Everyone immediately wondered how early in her career, if at all, the gaunt Mrs. Garland had gained the social experience of being talked about. She was known to have married Professor Garland, who was twenty years her senior, as soon as she left Girton,

and to have lived a life of rigid private virtue and riotous public speaking ever since. They supposed that she must be referring to the publicity which she had achieved by her campaign in favour of women's rights. To her listeners, grouped on the scented terrace in the summer dusk at Hampstead, it seemed somehow less impressive to be praised for being an advocate of women's rights than to be blamed for being an example of women's wrongs.

Mrs. Garland, who was quite unaware of the reflections which had created the sudden silence among her guests, added briskly:

"You might go into the question of the Higher Education of Girls while you're in Austria, Helen, if you have time. There are several points that I should like investigated at first hand. I'll give you a list."

"Certainly," said Helen, a little doubtfully, because she thought that what with the opera or a concert every night, and improving one's German, and visiting places of interest, and being companionable to Michael, and studying the history and art of the district, there might not be much time left for investigating the Higher Education of Girls. However, she felt that as her mother was being so extremely reasonable about the whole expedition—almost embarrassingly so, in fact—she could not well object to performing this small service in return; but she wished that the subject to be investigated were a slightly more inspiring one.

"The rest of you," said Michael, hoping that he did not sound too much like the co-educated organizer of a reading party, but nevertheless determined to have

everything settled that evening, " will follow in about a week's time, I suppose."

" If we start on August the seventh in the car——" Delia began.

" Whose car? " Joanna interrupted.

" Well, ours," replied Delia.

" Why not in mine? " David Herald suggested. " It goes faster."

" I know, darling, but it's so unspeakably uncomfortable."

" Not really, Delia; not in front, with cushions and goggles and things. You could sit in front——"

" Thank you, David!—while I bucket about in the back with quantities of luggage and Delia's husband, whom I don't even know! " exclaimed Joanna, bouncing on the geraniums in her indignation.

" Do mind the geraniums! " said Helen sharply. She felt far less compunction in preserving them from Joanna's violence than from Michael's.

" How does one bucket about with someone's husband, Joanna? " David inquired, with interest.

" The answer is, of course, that if it's Rupert, you don't," said Delia. " Rupert is quite incapable of bucketing about in the back of a car, even with you, Joanna, among the suitcases."

" *They'd* be on the luggage-grid, though," David reminded her.

" Not all of them. No luggage-grid in the world would hold all my suitcases, David. I always take so many more than anyone else does, somehow."

" Why shouldn't we go in both the cars, then? "

suggested Joanna, who was determined to have her fair share of David's society in spite of the galling fact that he had expressed such a marked preference for the company of Delia in the front seat.

"Yes, go in both cars," Michael urged them. In his anxiety to see the plans completed he was prepared to go to any lengths in making the arrangements for the rest of the party. "Then there'll be plenty of room for the luggage. You'll start on August the seventh. Allowing four days for the journey, you'll be at Salzburg on the evening of the tenth——"

"Provided that we're not delayed by anything fascinating on the way, Michael," said Delia.

"Or anybody," added David. "Delia was once fascinated by a policeman at Palermo," he explained, "and it took us two days to get away from that town. She said it was the picture gallery."

"So it was, partly," said Delia. "And he wasn't a policeman, David; he was a sort of Town Guard. Most picturesque, he was; even Rupert thought so."

"Well, supposing that you're not delayed by policemen or art galleries——"

"I shouldn't count on it, Michael," said David earnestly. "You haven't toured with Delia. I have. It makes everything very uncertain."

"But nice," said Delia. "We've always travelled pretty hopefully, even though sometimes we didn't arrive at all. At the proper destination, I mean. We always arrived somewhere."

"You mean the time when we set out for Bayreuth and arrived at Venice?" David reminded her.

"There's a sinister connexion between that expedition and this one, Delia, because we intended to go and listen to music then, and we missed it completely."

"Well, this time we had better face it," said Joanna.

Helen nudged Michael again; but he was past noticing Joanna's misplaced passion for making jokes. He said patiently:

"Assuming, for the purposes of argument, that you do arrive at Salzburg on the evening of the tenth, we had better book rooms for you. You'll want two single rooms and a double one."

"Four single rooms," said Delia. "Rupert sleeps so badly."

"It is perfectly absurd to suppose that because two people happen to be married, they are automatically condemned to share a bedroom," remarked Mrs. Garland. "It's one of the completely medieval social customs that we've got to fight against. I admire you for making a stand, Delia. You're perfectly right."

"As a matter of fact," said Delia, "it's Rupert who insists on it. He says I'm so restless, and that I talk in my sleep."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Garland, somewhat taken aback. She was wondering whether, in this case, Delia would not be justified in asserting her right to share her husband's bedroom, when Michael gathered up the threads of his plans again.

"Four rooms, then, on the tenth," he said, with an air of relief. "If you can't get there by then, you can wire us care of the poste restante. In the mean-

while, Helen, would you like me to get your ticket to-morrow when I get mine? Then I can reserve two places for us in the train, at the same time."

"Yes, Michael, do," said Helen. "I'll give you a cheque."

"No," said Mrs. Garland, "I will. I am going to pay for your expenses on this expedition, Helen. It seems a shame to let you pay for it out of the allowance that your father gives you, when one thinks of how much he would disapprove of the whole thing if he knew anything about it. He won't know anything about it, of course, but it seems hardly fair to spend his money on it."

Helen thought that this scruple was extremely typical of her mother. Mrs. Garland's passion for the rights of her own sex would not permit one step in the process of her daughter's emancipation to be paid for out of the pocket of her reactionary husband. Luckily she had money of her own with which to gratify such whims as this one. Helen realized, also, that her father would not care two pins how his money was expended, provided that he was not expected to examine accounts or to listen to a description of the expenditure. She sympathized with her father, and respected her mother, and thought herself fortunate in possessing two such admirable parents.

Michael rose. "Now that everything's settled, I ought to be getting back," he said. Michael lived in Chelsea, and it seemed a long way to Chelsea from Hampstead after a dinner-party.

Delia rose, too. "David is driving me home; and

we could give you a lift—couldn't we, David? "

"And me," said Joanna, knowing that it was of no use to expect that Michael would take her home in a taxi.

"Of course," David agreed. "Both of you." He wondered bitterly why Delia would never realize that he might want to be alone with her for even so short a time as the duration of the drive back to Bourdon Street. Now, he supposed, she would probably insist on being dropped first, leaving him to take the other two home without giving him the opportunity of coming in for a drink and a brief moment of friendly conversation. He reflected that she must be without exception the most unreasonable woman alive. But she was also very lovely, and had about her a sort of enchantment which made even her unreasonableness engaging. He knew that she had only to look at him out of those very large, dark eyes, that were sometimes deep blue and at other times an exquisitely mournful grey, and he would do whatever she suggested without any demur at all. He found this knowledge at once exasperating and consoling.

Delia was shaking hands with Mrs. Garland, who said earnestly:

"Do let me know, when you come back, how the attitude of the women strikes you in present-day Austria. It would interest me so much to hear your views."

"I shouldn't think Delia's ever been struck by an attitude," remarked Joanna inevitably. "She's more used to striking them."

Even Michael was exasperated by this, to Helen's secret joy. He said crossly:

"Really, Joanna, *must* you . . . ?"

"Certainly she must, if she wants to," said Mrs. Garland, who was prepared to overlook Joanna's pertness in her anxiety to champion a member of her own sex. "You ought to know by this time, Michael, that this is not the kind of household where only the men are supposed to make jokes."

Michael had never heard of a household where this rule obtained. He tried to imagine one, and thought that it must be very pleasant. That would be the kind of household that he would have when he could afford to have one at all—no feminine humour, no insistence on feminine rights; and above all, no jokes except those made by himself—and he was not in the habit of making them often. "With few, but with how splendid jokes—" and perhaps Helen would be there to applaud gently. Or perhaps not. Helen, for all her capacity for gentle applause at the right moment, and her sensible friendly attitude, and her perfect natural complexion, was sometimes a trifle dull. Joanna, now, although she was childish, and painted, and pert, was, at any rate lively. But then she would make jokes—and such very poor jokes at that. Women were very unsatisfactory, on the whole. There was Delia, of course—always slightly mysterious and quite exquisite, essentially frivolous, but beautiful and kind. Her kindness was proved once more by the patience with which she stood, her chiffons fluttering in the draught of the doorway, listening sweetly to Mrs.

Garland's disquisition on woman's reaction to Republicanism. Michael felt sure that Delia was not the sort of woman who would react to Republicanism either one way or the other; and that she would not greatly care how anyone else reacted to it. He reflected that Delia was probably the real solution to the problem of finding the ideal woman for the ideal household. But then Delia was married to that curious person, Rupert Temple-Cheyne, whom one so seldom saw. She was also inseparable, apparently, from David Herald. Delia might be—and was—infinitely desirable; but it was obvious that she was also quite unobtainable, so that it was idle to think of her in connexion with the ideal, jokeless household—or, indeed, with any household except her own, which seemed to consist of the almost invisible husband and the ubiquitous David Herald.

". . . and ante-natal care," Mrs. Garland was saying. "You might make some inquiries about that, too, Delia. Find out about the clinics, if there are any, and who runs them—and if there's any provision for free anæsthesia—and information about the use of contraceptives—and dental care, of course. All that sort of thing."

"Yes, indeed," replied Delia vaguely. She looked round to see if David were listening. "Perhaps he has taken all this in," she thought, "and then he can remind me when we get there. He has such a good memory."

"Make notes, Delia," Mrs. Garland urged. "Full notes. I could expand them into a short brochure on

the subject, in the autumn when I'm not so busy."

"I will, indeed," said Delia. "Lovely, ample notes. Good-bye, Rachel, and thank you for having us—me, I mean." She forgot sometimes, when she was with David, that he was not her husband and could speak for himself.

David was installing Joanna and Michael in the back seat of his rakish touring Alvis. "Now you can bucket about with Michael to your heart's content," he said to Joanna unkindly.

Joanna did not mind. She was fairly pleased with the prospect of a night drive in the back of a car with almost any young man, even if he were as solemn as Michael. Besides, she was thankful that she had been saved the expense of a taxi to Kensington, or the ignominious but economical alternative of being escorted home by Michael in the Underground.

David settled Delia in the front seat, wrapping her carefully in a rug lest her dress should come in contact with the gear-lever or the hand-brake, or any other possible sources of contamination by grease and dirt.

Joanna, observing this, felt aggrieved, because she considered that in her more exposed situation on the back seat she ought to have been given the rug. She realized with resentment that where Delia was concerned, if there were only one rug it would always be given to her, not only by David but by anyone else as well. Even Michael, who was her friend and not Delia's at all, doubtless approved of David's bestowal of the rug. Joanna consoled herself by reflecting

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that on the journey across Europe she would never be in the same car as Delia. Not that she disliked Delia; but it was nice to think that the amenities of whichever car she was travelling in, such as rugs and front seats and conversation with the driver, would be at her disposal, undisputed. The prospect of hours spent in David's company, racing through France and Germany in the Alvis, was pleasing. The prospect of an equal number of hours spent with Delia's mysterious husband pursuing the Alvis in the Talbot—for she supposed that she and Delia would divide their company fairly between the two cars—was interesting, but a difficult subject for speculation. She said to Michael in an undertone:

"What's Delia's husband like? Do you know him?"

"Can't hear," said Michael, because the car was moving very fast and Joanna's whisper was lost in the rush of wind.

Joanna did not want to shout lest she should be overheard by Delia and David; so she put her mouth close to Michael's ear and repeated her question.

Michael was pleasantly conscious of her curls blowing against his nose. He turned his face so that his lips were close to her own ear as he answered:

"I've met Rupert once. He's a tall, silent sort of chap—very well-mannered. He's in the Foreign Office."

Delia could see their reflection in the wind-screen. She averted her gaze hastily when she caught sight of Joanna's curls dancing against Michael's face in the

wind. "How stupid people are not to know about wind-screens," she thought. "It's so inconsiderate. Perhaps they would have preferred to have gone home in a taxi, and I've been officious in offering them a lift. Poor David would rather they weren't here, too. How tiresome!"

"I suppose," said David, trying to make his voice sound as if he did not care one way or the other, "that you want to be dropped first."

"Well," said Delia, considering the matter carefully, "if I went straight home now I could read *The Times* leader on disarmament before I went to bed, and that would please Rupert. On the other hand, my views on disarmament will have far more originality and charm if I don't read it—and, say what you will, I can do more with originality and charm than I can with facts, any day. Besides, it's a lovely night. If we drop these children first, you could take me home and come in and have a drink."

"That's a sound plan." David's spirits rose immediately. He began to sing, in a melodious undertone, about graves, and the green grass growing o'er his head. When David was in a really good mood he invariably sang one of a selection of peculiarly doleful Highland ditties, all harping on man's mortal nature. People who knew David well could judge the extent of his high spirits from the degree of necrophily of his song.

"Now David's happy; and Michael and Joanna are clinging to each other in the back seat; and Rupert will have gone to bed early and is having a good night's sleep—and everything is peaceful and satisfactory,"

thought Delia happily, as she wriggled farther into the rug, and pulled her chiffon cape over her head, so that she looked like Romney's portrait of Lady Hamilton at the spinning-wheel.

David put out an efficient hand and tucked the rug neatly round her legs.

They left Joanna at the forbidding little house in which she lived with her mother in the purlieus of the Gloucester Road.

Michael, companionless in the back seat, became talkative. He gave them a large number of instructions about their journey to Salzburg, to which David replied only with noncommittal grunts, and Delia with vague, polite murmurs of: "We must remember that," and "I'll tell Rupert." They were glad to part with him outside his flat in Markham Square.

Delia and Rupert Temple-Cheyne lived in a very small house in the little street which is really no more than an alley, running from Berkeley Square into Bourdon Street. The house was plentifully supplied with bathrooms, and contained very little living accommodation indeed. Immediately inside the front door there was a sitting-room panelled with mirrors to give an illusion of space. The mirror panelling did, indeed, gave an illusion of space—and of something more: for when Delia was receiving, it gave her guests the intoxicating illusion that they were surrounded by ten or a dozen Delias, all equally exquisite and willowy and welcoming. The sitting-room contained several arm-chairs, and several vases of pink spotted lilies, and hundreds of cigarettes, and very little else. Beyond

the sitting-room there was an even smaller apartment, which served the dual purpose of a dining-room and a withdrawing-room for Rupert. It was not much in demand as a dining-room, because the Temple-Cheynes took their meals in restaurants and their breakfasts in bed; but as a withdrawing-room for Rupert it was in constant use. It was his sanctuary, and he withdrew to it every time that he heard the sound of the front door-bell, and sometimes even when he heard the familiar voices of Delia's friends echoing in the alley as they turned into it out of Berkeley Square. Not that Rupert was an unsociable man, but, as he used to remind Delia when she reproached him with being elusive, he had many things to think about.

Somewhere at the end of the little passage that led to Rupert's lair there was a tiny kitchen, which looked so much like a laboratory that Delia never ventured to go into it. Here reigned an austere personage called Makepeace, who combined the manners of a butler with the appearance of a bishop, and who was valet to Rupert, maid to Delia, and unfailing prop and counsellor of the household.

Upstairs, the bedroom facing the alley was Delia's. Here was more mirror panelling, a great silver bed with a canopy of blue damask, some spidery furniture, and a profusion of roses. The other bedroom, which looked out over the back yards of the north side of Berkeley Square and was therefore supposed, erroneously, to be the less noisy of the two, was Rupert's—and here Rupert lay sleeping in his grey silk pyjamas outside the coverlet of the bed, for the night was air-

less, when his wife and David Herald arrived at the house.

David took Delia's key from her hand and opened the front door for her, very quietly. They went into the sitting-room, and there found the tray of drinks which the prescient Makepeace had left in readiness.

"Help yourself, David," said Delia. "I'll have barley-water, please, with a piece of ice—unless it's all melted."

David filled a glass for her, and carried it across the room to where she stood, with the cloud of chiffon still draped round her head. Humming happily to himself:

> "Dig ye my grave both deep and wide
> And lay me by my true love's side,"

he put it down on the table beside her.

Delia said: "Thank you, David. You're happy to-night."

"Of course I'm happy," said David. "My beautiful. . . ." He put his arms round her.

Delia passed a light finger down his cheek. "Nice David," she said vaguely; and added: "I think I'm rather sleepy. Drink up your drink, love, so that I can bolt the door after you before I go up. Rupert fusses rather about bolts. I can't think why."

"Do you know," said David, in an angry undertone, "that you're the most infuriating woman in England?"

"So you say, David. Nobody else does, though. Rupert never says so."

David groaned. "Can't we ever leave Rupert out of *anything*, Delia?"

"Of course not," Delia answered reproachfully. "You know quite well that I spend my entire time trying to include Rupert in everything—conversations, and compliments, and parties, and heaven knows what else—and that it is Rupert who is always trying to leave himself out, and generally succeeding. My dear David, if *I* started leaving Rupert out of things, in about a fortnight he just wouldn't be there at all."

"Much as I like Rupert," said David, "I can't say that I should regret that."

"Perhaps not. But I should. Rupert's very sweet, you know, David."

"You regard him simply as what the Americans call 'a background,' Delia, that's all."

"Well, it's not my fault that he won't come into the foreground. I have tried to make him. Besides, a background is a very important thing, David. Think how unhappy I should be if Rupert suddenly faded out and left me in the air."

David went close to her again. "You shouldn't have said that, Delia—because you know that you wouldn't be unhappy. You'd be with me."

"I might be miserable with you," said Delia thoughtfully. "I probably should be. You'd be so obtrusive, David. I think that on the whole it is more satisfactory to have a husband like a sort of consort, whom one brings forward and encourages, than the kind of husband whom one has to keep on putting in his place."

David took her hand. "Delia, for God's sake stop talking nonsense. We can't go on like this——"

"I know," said Delia plaintively. "I said so myself, ages ago. We may even have waked Rupert by now. I *said* I was sleepy when we came in, and it was you who insisted on having this stupid conversation, wasn't it, love?"

David said despairingly: "Oh, God!" and let go her hand. He stood staring at her.

Delia leaned towards him and kissed him very lightly on the chin. "Good night, sweet," she said. "Come and have a drink to-morrow evening . . . don't forget."

CHAPTER II

Michael Park and Helen Garland had arranged to meet at the barrier of the boat-train departure-platform at Victoria Station at half-past two in the afternoon of July the thirty-first. The Dover-Ostend boat-train left at three o'clock and both Michael and Helen believed in having plenty of time to spare. Michael arrived first, unaccompanied. Helen appeared a few moments later, with Joanna Nichols. A porter followed, carrying two small suitcases. Helen herself carried a waterproof, *The New Statesman*, a copy of *The Return of the Native*, a camera and a small square parcel. At the barrier she greeted Michael soberly and Joanna greeted him effusively.

Michael looked with approval at Helen's modest luggage and with regret at the collection of objects which she carried. "Delia," he thought, "would have a mountain of luggage and carry nothing at all except possibly something perfectly useless, such as a bunch of flowers. In some ways, I wish that Delia could have come with me by train, and that Helen could have gone by car with the others." He pointed severely to Helen's parcel.

"If that's cigarettes, you may as well resign yourself to paying duty on them. Nobody's going to let you

off the duty because you're carrying them in your hand!"

"Oh, but it's not cigarettes, Michael, it's a small spirit-lamp," said Helen eagerly. "I thought we could make tea with it in the train to-night. You know how terribly thirsty one gets sitting up all night. I thought it was such a good idea."

Michael was deeply distressful of other people's "good ideas." Experience had taught him that this expression was used, as a rule, as an apology for some monstrously foolish suggestion, whose author, secretly ashamed of it, sought to conceal the ineptitude of his plan by announcing it as a "good idea." At one time or another Michael had been invited to approve of a number of these good ideas which shocked him by their remarkable fatuity; and not one of them had been so indefensibly silly as Helen's plan for making tea with a spirit-kettle in the train in the middle of the night. It was, without any exception, the worst idea of which he had ever heard.

"I suppose it hasn't occurred to you," he remarked coldly, "that if you start boiling kettles in the train you're almost certain to set fire to something—and that we shall then be arrested?"

"By storm-troops," added Joanna.

Helen was quite unperturbed. She replied serenely, with no intention whatever of being funny: "Oh, no. It's perfectly safe. You see, it's a storm-kettle."

Michael decided to say no more about the kettle. He had no real hope that she would lose it, because he knew what an extremely competent girl she was; but

he did hope to induce her to forget about the possibilities of making tea, by offering her frequent glasses of lovely dark beer from the all-night buffets at the big stations at which they stopped.

Joanna frisked about on the platform, trying to read the labels on luggage which was upside-down, standing on tiptoe to peer in at the windows of the restaurant-car to see what they would have for tea, and making herself rather conspicuous altogether. She was wearing a remarkably conspicuous hat, too. Michael frowned disapprovingly and warmed somewhat towards Helen.

"I almost wish," said Joanna, jumping up and down in order to see whether the yellow cake were seed or plain, "that I could go by train with you now. No, I don't, because then I shouldn't be able to go by car with David and Delia and the mystery man."

"Who's the mystery man?" Helen inquired.

"Delia's husband, who's never seen by anyone."

"Rupert Temple-Cheyne? But he's not in the least mysterious, Joanna. How absurd you are! He is perfectly ordinary and rather nice."

"Why does he lurk, then?"

"He doesn't really lurk. He's in the Foreign Office, to start with; and he dislikes parties and Delia adores them, so Delia goes to parties with David Herald, and Rupert stays at home."

"Like the little pig," said Joanna. "It's all very disappointing. I had hoped that he was much more mysterious and romantic than that."

"He's neither. He's charming," replied Helen, who liked Rupert Temple-Cheyne and therefore refused

to hear him described as "mysterious" and "romantic," because she disapproved of young men being either the one or the other.

Michael was superintending the disposal of the luggage. Helen's two suitcases were put on the luggage-rack and Michael's was stowed under the seat. A large, bulging rucksack was causing some trouble, because it seemed to be impossible to fit it in anywhere.

It was now Helen's turn to be surprised at Michael's travelling outfit. "Is that your rucksack?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Michael shortly, scenting disapproval in her tone.

"What an uncomfortable thing to travel with," said Helen, eyeing it with annoyance. "Couldn't you have brought another suitcase instead?"

"It was much easier to pack the odd things in that," answered Michael defensively.

"They must be very odd things, Michael." The rucksack certainly contained some very bulky articles.

"They're mostly books, if you want to know."

"*Books?*" said Helen, shocked. "But of course they should have gone in a suitcase. You know books ought to be packed flat. And all those bulges can't be books."

"Oh, those—they're my climbing boots."

"But I thought we were going to Salzburg for the Festival—not for climbing," Helen protested.

"Yes, I know—' music, not mountaineering.' You said that before." Michael was becoming irritated. "Well, I thought it just possible that there might be

days when I'd feel more inclined to climb an Alp than to sit in a concert-hall."

Joanna, aware of an atmosphere of tension, decided to create a diversion. "Do you know," she said brightly, "that in an hotel I once stayed in at Chamonix there was a notice in the hall which said: 'It is defended to circulate in the corridors at night in the boots of ascension'?"

Both Helen and Michael were pleased with this, and ceased to quarrel. Joanna preened herself on her success as a peacemaker. She tweaked her absurd hat forward so that it almost obscured her right eye, and frisked more ostentatiously than ever.

"We had better get in," said Michael, fussing. "Don't bother to wait until the train goes, Joanna. Seeing trains go out is always so depressing." He had just observed on the platform a man he had known at Oxford, a serious person, and he began to find Joanna's exuberance embarrassing.

"Oh, it doesn't depress me at all," said Joanna airily. "You two get in, and I'll stand outside the window, and wave, and blow kisses. It'll create the right atmosphere for starting on a journey. I might even cry a little. It would be such good practice, in case I ever manage to get a film-test."

Michael, despairing of quelling Joanna, disappeared into the train.

Joanna said to Helen: "Do try and train Michael to be less pompous before we arrive, Helen. After all, you'll have nothing else to do for the next ten days. See what you can do about it, darling."

"Michael's all right," said Helen, annoyed that Joanna should have the effrontery to criticize Michael, whom she had known long before Joanna had met him. "He's rather a fussy traveller, but he's quite sweet, really."

"Oh, Michael's a lamb, all right—but he's got the makings of a first-class bell-wether about him, too," replied Joanna unkindly. "He's making faces at you through the window now. You'd better get in, and I'll stay here and wave."

Helen kissed Joanna perfunctorily, and thanked her without enthusiasm for having come to see them start. She joined Michael in the Pullman, and Joanna stood outside the window and made a series of very ridicuous gestures with a small green handkerchief. Helen watched her with disapproval, but Michael, now that his seriously minded friend was no longer on the platform, was disposed to be amused. He thought that Joanna looked really very gay and delightful, with her curls and her cocky little hat, and her pantomime with the handkerchief; while Helen, who was now reading *The New Statesman* with an earnest air in her corner, seemed rather too sober and sensible by contrast. Why, thought Michael angrily, are there no perfect women? Except Delia, of course. And Delia had a husband, and David Herald, blast him! and was hedged in by hordes of elaborate and expensive friends. But, at least, Delia was coming to Salzburg in ten days' time. It was true that she would be accompanied by the husband and the inevitable Herald. But still, she would be there.

The train started to move. Joanna, on the platform, stepped backwards and sat unexpectedly on a luggage barrow. Convulsed with laughter, she looked round at the porter behind her, who was also much amused. Forgetting to wave to her departing friends, she said something to the porter, and he, grinning broadly, took up the handles of the barrow and proceeded to wheel her down the platform.

"Look!" said Michael, to Helen, pointing out of the window at this curious sight.

Helen, looking up from *The New Statesman,* saw her friend being trundled away down the platform on the porter's barrow.

"Really," she said, "Joanna behaves as if she were still in the nursery."

Michael appeared to be amused. "There's certainly no chance of our being dull at Salzburg after she arrives," he said.

Helen was disposed to resent this. She wanted to retort: "So you're prepared for a dull ten days in my company, until Joanna turns up to entertain you by her antics?"; but she wisely refrained from saying anything at all.

Michael, unaware of having been tactless, remarked: "We'll have tea in the boat, I think—not here. It's too early now."

"I shan't have tea in the boat," replied Helen, "because I shall be being very seasick; so I had better have it now."

"But it's three o'clock," Michael objected. "You have only just had luncheon."

"I can't help that," said Helen, who believed in eating heartily on a journey.

"About this seasickness," Michael continued. "You know it's nothing but imagination. It's a perfectly fine day, the sea won't be rough, and there's no earthly reason why you should be ill——"

"Except that I always am," interrupted Helen, who was inclined to pride herself on this one delicacy in an otherwise remarkably reliable constitution.

"That," said Michael, "is just nonsense. If you'll stay on deck with me, and try to co-operate in the cure, I'll guarantee to get you to Ostend without a tremor."

"I won't, if it means taking pills, or drinking champagne, or any of the usual cures," said Helen.

"I haven't got any pills; and I wouldn't dream of drinking champagne on an Ostend packet," Michael answered. "Still less should I give you any if I wasn't going to drink it myself."

"What is the cure, then?" Helen asked, knowing quite well that Michael could not afford to drink champagne at his own expense either afloat or ashore.

"Simply the conquest of nervous apprehension by mental stimulus," Michael replied. "Do you remember how one's nurse used to charm away an attack of hiccoughs by telling one a story? It's the same principle, exactly. Only I shan't tell you a story because I know my own limitations. Half-way through it your attention would begin to wander, and you'd start watching the horizon, and the battle would be lost from that moment. No, my charm is argument.

As soon as we leave the shore I shall start making provocative statements—the kind of statements that I know you'd have to challenge even on your death-bed. You'll never be able to resist the temptation to disprove them, and as soon as you have disposed of one I shall advance another even more outrageous theory. I have great faith in it as a cure. Of course, it's only suitable for people like you, Helen. It would be useless for somebody who had no opinions, or who didn't like discussions."

Helen felt flattered at being placed in the category of persons who were amenable to Michael's cure for seasickness. While prepared to co-operate loyally with him in making the cure a success, she took the precaution, nevertheless, of having tea in the train, because she doubted if even the most impassioned advocacy of the most indefensible of causes would so rouse her interest and banish her uneasiness as to enable her to eat on a cross-Channel steamer.

Michael watched with faint disgust while she ate a plateful of thick, pallid bread and butter and several large wedges of yellow cake. She ate briskly and tidily, without seeming to enjoy what she was eating, but with an air of taking in the regulation quantity of nourishment at the appropriate hour. Michael thought of Delia, who was vague and finicking about her food, and of Joanna, who was frankly greedy; and it seemed to him that it was better to be selective, and better even to gobble, than to treat a meal as dispassionately as Helen treated it.

Once aboard the *Prince Baudouin*—that too-elegant

vessel which makes up in cocktail-bars what it lacks in lavatory accommodation—Michael hastened to establish Helen in a deck-chair so situated that she faced the blank, painted iron surface of a funnel, and could not, without turning round, see the ocean at all. Feeling that he could leave her safely to her own devices while the *Prince Baudouin* was still stationary, he descended to one of the many bars and there consumed a ham sandwich and a glass of beer, more for the reason that in England beer is unobtainable at tea-time and ham-sandwiches rare than because he actually wanted either. When sundry bangs and clankings, expletives in Flemish, and a jarring sensation warned him that they were leaving the quay, he hurried back to Helen. He found her with her eyes closed and an expression of resignation on her face. Michael seated himself beside her and said loudly:

"Assuming, for the purposes of argument, that Sir Oswald Mosley had usurped the throne of England, I suppose that you'd think it your duty, as a good citizen and a public-spirited person, to co-operate loyally in the new *régime*?"

Helen opened her eyes and sat up at once. "I don't know how you can suppose anything so absurd, Michael," she said indignantly. "Of course it's the duty of any public-spirited person to resist tyranny, whoever imposes it. And Mosley——"

"Well, I don't know," said Michael. "Once you've got a dictatorship——"

The hypothetical dictatorship carried them safely through at least a third of the voyage. When Michael

observed that Helen's enthusiasm for the subject was waning, and that she was beginning to answer at random and to cast apprehensive glances over her shoulder at the calm surface of the sea, he allowed the discussion to lapse for a moment, and then introduced, with great astuteness, a new topic.

"I do think," he said, "that it is perfectly ridiculous of Joanna to want to act for the films. I don't suppose she'd be much good at it; and, in any case, I've no patience with all this nonsense about women earning their own living. A woman's job is looking after a husband and children."

He knew that Helen, being Rachel Garland's daughter, could not fail to respond to this challenge. She forgot the almost imperceptible heaving of the *Prince Baudouin* as she answered:

"I don't agree with you at all. Not that I think Joanna would be a good film actress; but a woman has just as much right——"

When the question of women's rights had been settled satisfactorily the Belgian coast was already in sight. Sand-dunes glimmered mournfully in the distance, and the gaunt outlines of the tall, melancholy hotels of Ostend were visible. A brief argument about the merits of co-education sufficed to tide over the last quarter of an hour. Hoarse, but triumphant, Michael shepherded Helen ashore.

"Now," he remarked, as they made their way through the crowd to the *douane*, "I hope you're convinced that your tendency to seasickness is purely imaginary?"

Helen was far less grateful to him than he had expected her to be. "Well, it was awfully calm, Michael," she replied, with irritating complacence; "and having tea in the train probably had a good deal to do with it. I've always been told that one ought to eat a good meal just before going on board a boat."

"That's right," thought Michael savagely, as he watched a Customs officer rummaging among the boots and books in his rucksack, "take all the credit to yourself, do. Don't condescend to admit that I talked you out of your silly complex; and don't dream of being grateful to me for doing violence to my own feelings all the way from Dover to Ostend by adopting the most idiotic arguments so that you could contradict them. Go on: congratulate yourself on your own cleverness in stuffing yourself with seed cake in the train. Joanna wouldn't have given seasickness a thought. She'd have been rollicking about all over the ship, behaving like a perfect fool, no doubt, but at least there'd have been no need for me to talk myself hoarse and not even get any thanks for it. Delia wouldn't have worried about being sick, either; but if she had, and I'd cured her by the argument method, *she* would have been grateful. Delia's gratitude—that's a pleasant thing to think of."

They found their reserved places in the train. Michael had asked for two corner seats, and he was annoyed to find that they had been given only one, with the other reserved place next to it. He told Helen, rather coldly, to take the corner seat. To his

surprise, Helen suggested humbly that he should occupy it, protesting that she had no objection whatever to sitting in the other one. Michael would not allow this, but he was pleased to observe that her inherited theories about women's rights were not put into actual practice, and that she never insisted upon the privileges of her sex. Unless, he thought suddenly, she does it because she claims equality with men. The seat in Parliament rather than the seat in the omnibus—that line of attack. He hoped sincerely that this was not so. But one never knew with Helen. She had been crammed too full of facts and theories by her parents—that was her trouble. He had known Helen for several years, but he had never had any real idea of what was going on in her mind. And yet she lacked the charm of inscrutability. She was merely baffling. Quite unlike Delia, for instance, in whose mind nothing much went on, he imagined—and who managed, without any effort at all, to appear exquisitely enigmatic.

Their compartment was full when the train started. Their fellow travellers consisted of a middle-aged Englishwoman, two German girls, and an enormous Belgian with a beard. The Englishwoman had the corner seat facing Helen. She sat bolt upright, clasping her bag tenaciously with both hands, as though she feared that it might be snatched from her, and suggesting by her expression and general demeanour that she had just been affronted, and that she anticipated many further and worse affronts before her journey was ended. The German girls sat stolidly

in the other two corners, sucking sweets and staring in front of them with blank faces.

As soon as the train had left the station, the Belgian lit a cigar. He then leant across the Englishwoman, who sat rigid with disapproval, and shut the window. Helen looked regretfully at the closed window, and resigned herself to the inevitable discomforts of foreign travel. Michael was thinking that the Belgian looked rather a jolly sort of person, and wishing that he, too, could afford to smoke cigars.

Suddenly the Englishwoman remarked, to nobody in particular, keeping her eyes fixed on the luggage-rack above Helen's head:

"I had no idea that this was a smoking-compartment."

Nobody made any reply to this. As the compartment was conspicuously labelled "*Fumeur. Raucher,*" there was really nothing to be said.

After a pause, the Englishwoman lowered her gaze and fixed it upon Helen. She said, pointedly:

"Wouldn't you prefer to have that window open?"

Helen would have very much preferred to have it open, but she had a positive horror of making a fuss about arrangements in trains—particularly Continental trains. She smiled at her aggressive compatriot and replied pacifically:

"Oh, no, thank you; I'm perfectly comfortable."

The other woman gave her a scornful glance which clearly indicated that she thought her a poor-spirited creature, and then directed her attention to Michael.

She leaned forward and tapped him sharply on the knee.

"I think," she said, "that the window ought to be open."

Michael looked at her gloomily. She had handsome, weather-beaten features, and wore very well-cut tweed clothes which were singularly unbecoming to her. He then looked at the Belgian, who was placidly puffing at his cigar and reading *L'Indépendance*, and was again impressed by the fact that he was a very large man indeed.

"Oh, no," said Michael pleasantly to the Englishwoman, "not in this weather. It would be so cold."

"*Cold!*" she repeated, in tones of extreme displeasure, "in July!"

"But a very inclement July." Michael indicated the chill dusk which enveloped the Belgian countryside. Then, to make his position perfectly clear, he lit a cigarette and began to read.

The Englishwoman, having failed to find allies in her own compatriots, seemed to be meditating independent action in her campaign for fresh air. She glanced covertly at her Belgian neighbour out of the corner of her eye, as though taking his measure as an adversary.

The Belgian, observing this, thought that she was trying to read something on the back page of his newspaper. He half rose, and, with a bow, put *L'Indépendance* into her hands.

"Prenez-le, madame," he said, with a cordial gesture. "J'en ai des autres."

Her fresh-air campaign defeated at one stroke, she could only murmur, "Merci," with a bad grace and a worse accent, and sit staring uncomprehendingly at the paper, while her neighbour produced another journal from the pocket of his overcoat and settled down to read that, with the pleasant conviction that by closing the window and dispensing reading matter he had made everybody cosy and comfortable.

It was dark outside by this time. The Englishwoman made a pretence of reading her unwanted newspaper, occasionally scowling at Helen over the top of it. The two German girls had gone to sleep with their mouths open. Helen, having read every word of *The New Statesman*, was trying to nerve herself to begin *The Return of the Native*. She felt rather hurt because Michael was so uncommunicative. She was more than a little attracted by Michael, and she had looked forward very much to the ten days which they were to spend together before the others arrived. She was not particularly interested in the other members of the party. She was fond of Delia, because Delia was always amiable and charming; and she liked Delia's husband, although, in common with everyone else, except Delia herself, she had seen very little of him. Joanna's skittishness always irritated her; and she did not much care for David Herald. His extravagantly protective instincts and his romantic views about women conflicted awkwardly with her carefully cultivated spirit of independence. But Michael's attitude towards her own sex appealed to her very much. He did not pamper her, which she would have resented;

nor did he treat her cavalierly, which she would have resented even more strongly. He was, besides, informative, argumentative, and had plenty of opinions—three qualifications which she had been brought up to believe essential in a serious person. Moreover, she liked his face. It was not surprising, therefore, that she had set out on this expedition with a pleasant thrill of anticipation. She had indulged in delightful day-dreams about the intellectual pleasures that they would share. Together they would attend concerts and the opera, bending their two flaxen heads over the same score in charming intimacy. Together they would visit Mozart's birthplace and the local museums—if any—and such churches and other ancient buildings as were scheduled as being worthy of the tourist's notice. Separately, they would study the history of the town and district, only to compare notes on their studies afterwards to their mutual benefit and enjoyment. The whole prospect had seemed very agreeable. But if Michael were going to be morose and touchy, most of the charm of their ten days would be lost. She looked at Michael, who was frowning over *L'Amour, Terre Inconnue*, and sighed despondently.

To her relief, the restaurant-car attendant announced the first service of dinner. She nudged Michael hopefully. He looked up from his book with a resigned expression.

"Now?" he said. "Oh, very well. What a mania you have for meals, Helen."

This was not encouraging. Helen said apologetically: "I'm afraid I'm hungry again, Michael. In

spite of that tea. I expect it's because I survived the crossing so well—thanks to you."

Michael was mollified. Now that she had professed belated gratitude for his efforts on board the *Prince Baudouin*, he was prepared to overlook her earlier ungraciousness. He was even prepared to be cordial to her at dinner, and to tell her what he knew about Mozart, which was not much. Followed by the Englishwoman, they set off down the swaying corridor towards the restaurant car.

Dinner was long, indifferent and expensive. Michael, however, had regained his good humour. He and Helen made friends with a French commercial traveller who sat at their table, to the obvious disgust of the Englishwoman, who occupied the fourth place. She had found a small ventilator above the window, which she opened very ostentatiously, and when dinner was over she continued to sit there, evidently preferring solitude and crumbs and the smell of cooking to the cosmopolitan society in her own compartment.

When Michael and Helen returned to it they found that the Belgian and the two girls had gone. They were rejoicing in having the compartment to themselves for the moment when the train stopped at the frontier station, and a business-like, brown-shirted individual, with a martial manner, appeared in the doorway. He addressed them in German at some length.

Neither Michael nor Helen understood German. They smiled nervously, and produced their passports. These he waved aside, pointing, with evidence of annoyance, to *L'Indépendance*, which lay on the seat.

"Not mine," said Michael politely.

The German did not understand. He repeated his peroration with signs of even greater displeasure. Michael felt that at all costs he must disown the offending newspaper. Making towards it a gesture of repudiation, he said firmly:

"*Das ist nein mein.*"

The natural good manners of the Frenchman forbid him to betray amusement at the linguistic blunders of the English abroad. The simpler German suffers from no such inhibition. If the foreigner is unintentionally funny—why, heaven be praised for something to laugh at! Jokes are not so plentiful in the Fatherland that one can afford to ignore a good, harmless subject for laughter. Such was certainly the view of the brown-shirted individual. He uttered a loud laugh and seized *L'Indépendance*, bundling it up under his arm. Giving a comprehensive glance round the compartment, he grasped *The New Statesman* and bundled that up too, peered suspiciously at *The Return of the Native* and *L'Amour, Terre Inconnue*, and departed, still chuckling.

"That was splendid, Michael," said Helen enthusiastically. "Do always make them laugh, if you can. I'm sure it will get us out of a lot of difficulties."

Michael was not at all sure that he liked having his earnest attempt to speak German regarded as a comic turn which could be relied upon to change the most serious situation into a farce. He hoped sincerely that he would not be called upon to provide further comic relief in the course of the journey. Michael had no

faith in his own talents as a humorist. Then he remembered Helen's spirit-kettle, and her plans for making tea, which would almost certainly result in situations of the utmost complexity. He decided that if only he could persuade her to go to sleep soon, before she had time to feel thirsty, she might forget that she had brought it.

He sat beside her and talked amiably and monotonously about the dullest subjects he could think of, until Helen's eager comments became fewer and more uncertain, and finally stopped altogether. The Englishwoman came back, and took her place opposite, with unrelenting grimness. She took off her hat, and tied a large bandana handkerchief round her head, which gave her an indescribably rakish air, like an amateur gipsy. Still rigidly erect, she closed her eyes and composed herself to slumber. Two German women and a man got in and occupied the vacant seats. The man lit a short black pipe, and the Englishwoman twitched her well-bred nostrils indignantly, without opening her eyes. One of the women snored. Helen, who had been fast asleep in her corner for some time, swayed towards Michael as the train passed over some points. She did not wake, but her head came to rest on his shoulder.

Michael looked down amiably enough at the mass of short, fair hair. It was less attractive, he thought, than Joanna's curls; but, on the other hand, Helen's flawless complexion—he could just see her cheek by craning his head—was very much more attractive than Joanna's rather inexpert make-up. He fell into a doze. Presently

he awoke with excruciating cramp in his right shoulder. The light burden of Helen's head had become almost unendurable. Remembering the spirit-kettle, he bore it as long as he could. Then, when he could not endure the cramped position for another moment, he put her gently back into her corner. Mercifully, she did not wake. "How the girl sleeps," he thought; "almost as determinedly as she eats."

He, too, fell into a heavy slumber.

CHAPTER III

MICHAEL and Helen arrived at Salzburg on the following afternoon, feeling stiff, tired and dirty. They had slept uneasily through the night, lurching against each other and apologizing politely when their heads met with a bump and they awakened. Michael had dissuaded Helen from using the spirit-kettle. She had given way without much protest because the awful eye of the intimidating Englishwoman had been upon her when she had suggested making tea. Instead, they had eaten various snacks at the stations at which the train stopped—coffee and gingerbread at Cologne, beer and a piece of sausage at Frankfort, and more coffee and cakes at Wurzburg. They had changed trains at Munich, where they were taken in hand by an efficient but dictatorial porter, who said "Kommen-Sie hier" and shooed them before him as though they were unmanageable sheep. They had passed through various stages of irritation and discomfort on the journey, being impatient with each other in the early morning, grimly forbearing during the forenoon, and, after Munich, comatose and depressed as the train meandered among the melancholy lakes and forests of Bavaria. Michael had shaved in tepid water in the swaying lavatory in the train, and had cut his chin in two places. Helen

had performed an unsatisfactory toilet in the station at Munich, where she had been obliged to pay two *Pfennige* for the use of a very second-hand piece of soap. In Bavaria it was raining and chilly. Helen was forced to put on her waterproof in order to keep warm, and sat in a stupor of weariness wrapped in this unsuitable garment, while Michael dozed restlessly in the opposite corner. The inevitable Englishwoman, now buttoned into a neat ulster, sat knitting in the far corner. Just as the train was approaching Salzburg she addressed Helen for the second time during the entire journey.

"Where are you staying?" she demanded.

"We don't know yet," Helen answered uncomfortably, feeling that her reply sounded so unconvincing that the Englishwoman must surely think it disingenuous. "You see, we're the advance guard of a party and we've come on ahead to find a nice hotel before the others get here."

The Englishwoman looked pained. "I was hoping that you might know of a good *pension*," she said coldly. And added: "My name is Talbot. Miss Talbot."

Helen felt that she had better introduce herself, too. "My name is Helen Garland," she said.

Miss Talbot's formidable stare increased in intensity. She said: "Not Rachel Garland's daughter, by any chance? But what a curious coincidence! I was at Cambridge with your mother."

"*Were* you?" said Helen, trying not to sound despondent, because she feared that after this discovery it might be difficult to shake off Miss Talbot.

"Certainly I was. She was a particular friend of mine at Girton, although I don't believe I have ever seen her since. She married so soon after she went down. But I have always followed her work on behalf of women with great interest. You must give me her address, and I will write to her and tell her I have met you."

"Yes," replied Helen, looking in her bag for a pencil. She began to wonder if she might not be able to turn this unsought acquaintanceship to good account by setting Miss Talbot to do a little investigation into the Higher Education of Girls in Austria, as she seemed to take an interest in such matters. She wrote down her mother's address and handed it to Miss Talbot.

"Are you going to Salzburg for the Music Festival?" she inquired.

"Partly. That is to say, in order to hear some of the operas. I don't care for Mozart or Beethoven, or for any good music. I don't pretend to understand it. But certain second-rate music I enjoy particularly. I have already written for seats for *Rosenkavalier* and *The Egyptian Helen* and *Elektra*. Strauss and Weber give me great pleasure. I should like to hear *Tristan*, too, but I find the strain of sitting through a performance which lasts five hours very trying."

Helen thought: "What a curious woman! She looks so horsy and hard-bitten, and she has a back like a ramrod and a manner like a machine-gun, and she adores sugary Viennese music! I might get her to find out about the education of these girls for

Mother, though. Then I shan't have to waste time that I'd rather spend with Michael."

Michael was still asleep. Miss Talbot continued to knit in silence until the train stopped at Salzburg, where she parted from them with a brisk nod and marched away down the platform. Michael woke, feeling cold and stiff and out of humour. Helen herself was too tired to attempt to appear cheerful. The first impression of Salzburg was encouraging, however. The sun was shining. The large, airy station was decorated with groups of hot-house flowers in pots, and the Customs examination of the luggage was cursory and courteous. Michael and Helen decided to leave their luggage at the station and to walk about the town and explore. They emerged from the station precincts and looked about them. Close at hand was a very large hotel. They were crossing the road to see what it was like, when Michael stopped Helen and pointed to a notice: "*Thé Dansant*. Theatre-Supper and Dancing Nightly."

"It's no good going in there," he said. "We couldn't possibly stay at an hotel where they have tea-dances and supper-dances. For all you know they may have breakfast- and luncheon-dances as well."

Helen recoiled very properly from the thought of these terpsichorean orgies, and they proceeded down a long, dusty suburban road. The town appeared to be farther from the station than they had supposed. Helen suggested, tentatively, that they should take a tram.

"We ought to walk," Michael urged, but without much conviction. "It's the only way of getting to know a place."

"Yes, but that only applies to a short stay in a large town," Helen pointed out. "This town is quite small, and we shall be here for a month. We shall get to know it very soon on foot when we're not so tired as we are now."

Michael wavered. "But we don't know where we want to get out," he objected. "It's so difficult to take tickets to nowhere in particular, when you don't speak German."

"Watch what the person next you pays and give the conductor twice as much and say, '*Zwei, bitte,*'" Helen suggested intelligently.

Michael gave in because he disliked the dusty suburb as much as she did, and they boarded a tram at the next stopping-place. By means of Helen's formula he took two tickets without difficulty, admitting rather grudgingly to himself that she certainly made very sensible suggestions at times, as if to compensate for the awful ineptitude of her "good ideas" about things like spirit-kettles.

The tram had passed through the dusty suburb and was carrying them into the middle of the town. Tall stucco houses, adorned with gay paintings and elaborate plaster mouldings, lined the streets. The tram clanged through an ancient, massive archway, swayed round a bend in a narrow street, and stopped. Several people alighted.

"Let's get out here," said Helen, grabbing Michael's

arm. "There's the river, and I want to walk over the bridge."

"I hope she's not determined to manage this expedition entirely," thought Michael, as he followed her out of the tram. "First of all she insisted on our getting into a tram when I thought we ought to walk, and then, when we've only gone about five hundred yards in the thing, she insists on getting out again." He followed morosely on to the bridge.

Helen was leaning against the parapet of the bridge and gazing about her with rapture. Below them the Salzach rushed turbulently between the massive piers of the bridge. In front of them, towering over the ancient and beautiful little town with its domes and steeples crowded between the river and the rock, rose the Festungsberg, grey and wooded, crowned with the fortress. Behind them was the green height of the Kapuzinerberg. Ancient houses, gay with coloured stucco and enriched by arcading and ornate plasterwork, bordered the south bank of the Salzach. On the north bank was a wide terrace planted with trees.

Michael's moroseness vanished as he looked about him. He had been told that Salzburg was an old town—an interesting, even a fascinating town—but nobody had told him that it was beautiful. The more he gazed at it the more beautiful it appeared to him to be. The fact that the bridge on which he stood was made of iron and was hideous seemed unimportant. Even a large, barrack-like pink hotel which overshadowed the little old houses on the north bank could not affect so much charm. Michael forgot the

journey and the fact that his legs were stiff and that he felt dirty. "I am going to like this place," he thought. "It's the only town I've ever visited that is better than I expected it to be. It's so beautiful, and so surprising. There's such an air of gaiety about it. Perhaps the inhabitants create that." He stopped admiring the town and began to notice the cheerful crowds which thronged the bridge and the small square at the end of it.

After a few minutes he turned to Helen, who was still staring ecstatically at the Mönchsberg. He said, cautiously: "I say, Helen, have you noticed the people in this place? I mean, have you noticed their clothes?"

Helen obediently withdrew her attention from the view and concentrated it upon the passers-by. Michael observed that a slightly bewildered expression came into her face.

"I suppose," she said in a low voice, "that those are the Tyrolese hats one hears about? But I never knew that people actually *wore* them. Off the stage, I mean. They're very peculiar, Michael. Those things like shaving-brushes at the back . . ."

"I like the ònes with feathers better, myself," Michael answered, pleased to discover that Helen, too, was taken aback by the costume worn by the majority of the crowd on the bridge. "Have you noticed those very odd little jackets?"

Helen nodded. "And the braces. They're awfully elaborate. And, oh, Michael, the *shoes*!"

"The women's clothes are rather unexpected, too," said Michael. "I like the absurd aprons."

"Perhaps it's a *festa* or a public holiday," Helen suggested, "and that's why so many people are wearing the national costume."

Michael agreed that this must be the case. Together they wandered over the bridge and through the narrow, thronged streets of the oldest part of the town, their spirits rising every moment. Each time that they turned a corner they were delighted with a fresh view of the Festungsberg or the river, seen between the tall houses or through a massive archway. They found themselves at length in an open square, the Alter Markt, and Michael pointed out a coffee-house with little tables under a green trellis.

"Let's have tea," he said, "before we start worrying about hotels."

Helen was glad that Michael had at last suggested having a meal before she had thought of it. During the journey she had become a little self-conscious about her own insistence on frequent nourishment, and Michael's air of resignation when he agreed to have another meal. They found a table on the verandah under the trellis, and ordered coffee and little cakes.

"Lovely town!" said Helen, in a sentimental tone which was very different from her usual matter-of-fact manner.

"Perfect town!" Michael echoed fondly, gazing across the square at the charming establishment of the archiepiscopal apothecary, which is probably the most picturesque chemist's shop in existence.

All round them people were drinking beer or coffee, or even glasses of water, and laughing and talking and

reading the newspapers, dressed in the same astonishing costume which had excited their interest first on the bridge. Old men and young men alike wore shorts and brief jackets elaborately trimmed with frogging and silver buttons, and complicated braces of tooled leather connected by an ornamental leather strap across the chest. Some wore square-toed buckled shoes. One and all, even those in the small minority whose attire was otherwise conventional, wore the irresistible hat. There were several women dressed in full, flowered cotton dresses with tight-fitting black bodices and tiny lace-edged aprons.

"The odd thing about these people," Helen murmured to Michael, "is that most of them don't seem to be peasants at all, although they're wearing this enchanting peasant costume."

Michael agreed. "It's probably the custom on high days and holidays for the local townsfolk to wear it, too," he said. "The people in this café are certainly not peasants. They're far too prosperous-looking. I expect they're the burgesses of Salzburg and their families."

As he spoke, an enormous touring Austro-Daimler drew up in the square outside the café. At the wheel was an extremely attractive young woman, hatless, whose sleek head and subtle complexion indicated a degree of sophistication which was remarkably at variance with the peasant dress which she wore. Beside her was a tall, dark young man, who looked, if possible, even sleeker and more sophisticated, and he, too, was dressed in the local fashion to the last elaborate

detail. His linen shorts were slashed at the sides and piped with green, his linen jacket had green pipings and frogging, oak-leaves cut out of green cloth were applied as decorative *motifs* to the collar, and the silver buttons were extremely handsome. He wore buckled shoes and, crushed rakishly on one side of his head, a green Tyrolese hat with an immensely tall feather in it.

These two excessively elegant people parked their car and entered the café. They beckoned to a waitress, and the young man said with a very fair English accent: "Two coffees with cream, please, and some cakes."

Michael looked at Helen and blinked. "I admit," he murmured, "that that's got me beat. It's just not sensible at all. They ought to be at Deauville, those two, wearing co-respondent shoes and playing baccarat. What do you suppose they're doing here, dressed up like characters in *White Horse Inn*?"

"And the oddest thing of all is that they are talking English," said Helen. "Quite good English, too. It's very confusing and queer."

Her last remark was overheard by an elderly gentleman at the next table. He, too, was dressed like most of his neighbours in the national costume. His large knees emerged from a pair of serviceable leather shorts, and his hat was of the variety which Helen and Michael learned to recognize later as the Aussee hat—that is to say, it was black, bound and trimmed with green ribbon, and adorned with a bunch of white eider-duck's feathers at the back. He leaned towards them and remarked confidentially:

"They all talk English here, you know, these

foreigners. It's the fashion, apparently. The young ones in particular, like that couple over there that's just come in, they won't talk anything else in public. Most of them talk it pretty well, I must say. I regard it as rather a compliment to us, in a way."

Michael and Helen murmured something polite in return. Then they paid their bill and left the Café Tomaselli in a state of considerable bewilderment.

"When I thought it was only the peasants wearing their national dress for a public holiday I could understand it," Michael complained as they walked down the Alter Markt. "Then, when I realized that most of them were not peasants at all, I thought they must be the rich townspeople wearing local costume out of a desire to support a Patriotic Front or some equally middle-European gesture. But when it comes to a couple of cosmopolitan lounge-lizards and an elderly Englishman, who's probably either a retired major, a bank-manager or a solicitor, *all* wearing fancy dress—then I just give it up."

"It's all very well for the natives to do it——" Helen began.

Michael interrupted her. "I beg of you not to refer to the inhabitants of this charming town as if they were an obscure brown tribe. You'll be talking about Mandatory Powers in another moment."

"For the Salzburgers, then. It's their own local costume, and they're entitled to wear it and I don't see why they shouldn't. It's very decorative, and it's sensible and healthy——"

"Oh, for God's sake——!" said Michael.

"Decorative, then, and cheerful." Helen regretted her momentary lapse to the maternal scale of values. "It gives the final touch to the charm of this delicious place. But for the visitors to the place to do it seems to me too absurd for words. If it's the fashion, then I've no patience with it. I might as well start a fashion in England for wearing sun-bonnets and smocks."

"Delia *could* start a fashion for that, now," said Michael absently.

Helen felt hurt, but she swallowed her resentment and said: "But who wants to see people like us dressed as peasants, however picturesque?"

"It depends on the kind of peasant costume," Michael replied. "I've not the least wish to go about like Gaffer Hodge, in a smock and leggings and a beehive hat, but, on the other hand, if my national costume were as attractive as this one is I might be tempted to wear it."

"Not seriously, Michael?" exclaimed Helen, shocked.

They were wandering down a narrow alley lined with small shops whose principal wares seemed to be articles of national costume. To her astonishment, Michael executed a brief caper on the cobblestones before he replied:

"I'm sorry, Helen, but I find it rather difficult to feel serious at the moment. It's the effect of Salzburg; but it will wear off in time, I dare say, so don't be alarmed."

Helen was not alarmed, but she was very much surprised at Michael's frivolous mood. She had always

regarded him as the reverse of frivolous, an earnest young man who could be cheerful when cheerfulness was required, but whose chief characteristic was a sobriety of demeanour which matched a serious habit of mind. And here he was, capering about in a side street in Salzburg and making extravagant gestures of blowing kisses, for all the world like an intoxicated Frenchman, at a particularly superb Aussee hat in a shop-window.

"Michael!" she said reproachfully, "you don't mean that you *approve* of all this dressing-up?"

"I don't see why not," said Michael, who had stopped capering and was flattening his nose against the window of a shop which sold "Herrenwaren und Artikel für Sport." "Should you consider it ridiculous if I bought a made-up bow-tie on elastic which is called a 'sport-torpedo'?"

"I'd think it pretty silly if you wore it," said Helen firmly. "And as for that elderly Englishman in the café, who was got up to look like a yodeller in a cabaret, I think he must be perfectly insane."

"Of course, I admit that it's undignified and ridiculous to wear the national dress of some other country," Michael agreed. "But I wish it were not, because I should have liked to have worn these clothes." He looked longingly at a very decorative jacket, richly trimmed with froggings and buttons and oak-leaf ornaments. "Don't you want to wear them yourself, Helen? You'd look charming in that pink dress with the little black bodice."

"Certainly not," replied Helen. "I don't in the

least want to make myself look as ridiculous as that old idiot in the café!"

As she spoke, a party of people wearing the national dress crowded past them down the little alley. One of the men said, as they passed, to the girl beside him: "It's your turn to go to the poste restante to-morrow."

"All right," replied the girl; "though all I ever seem to get out of the English mail is bills."

"Never mind," said the young man; "we'll all stand you drinks at the Café Bazar afterwards, as a reward."

Michael and Helen stared after them as they disappeared round the corner.

"They were English, too!" Helen said in astonishment.

"It's my belief," said Michael, "that at least half the people one sees wearing these local clothes are English visitors to the place. It's most extraordinary. Did you notice the tall one's hat? It was very striking."

"With red and green cords round it, you mean, and a cock's feather? It was the most crazy hat I've ever seen."

"Mad," said Michael, "but impressive, all the same. I suppose we ought to start looking for an hotel, Helen. It's nearly eight o'clock."

They had found their way back to the bridge by this time and were standing in front of the Rathaus admiring its beautiful plaster-work. Lights were beginning to show in the old town and to illuminate the large hotels on the other side of the river.

"Let's try and find one this side of the bridge,"

Helen suggested. "It looks so much more modern and less exciting over there."

"We'd be more likely to find bathrooms in the newer hotels," Michael reminded her; "the ones on this side are probably a trifle primitive."

"I'd rather stay in an old one and wash in a basin," said Helen.

Michael thought it possible that Delia would not share this view of the rival claims of antiquity and plumbing. He reflected, however, that they could easily move to a more modern establishment before the rest of the party arrived.

"You'd better find out from the phrase-book what is the German for 'bedroom' and 'price,'" Helen suggested. "And say we only want the rooms for one night so that we can leave to-morrow if we aren't happy. How are you going to ask for rooms?"

Michael consulted the phrase-book.

"'*Ich möchte zwei Schlafzimmer für eine Nacht*' —that sounds all right, doesn't it?"

"Yes, so long as you don't lose your head and ask for '*ein Schlafzimmer für zwei Nächte*,'" said Helen anxiously.

Michael, somewhat nettled, replied that he would not do this and they proceeded up the Getreide-gasse, where Helen insisted on stopping at almost every step in order to admire the beautiful signs of wrought-iron work and gilding which swung over the doorways of shops and eating-houses, almost meeting across the narrow street.

"Let's try this one," said Michael suddenly, stopping in front of a tall, narrow building gaily painted,

whose sign announced that it was Der Goldene Esel. "I like the look of it."

"Let me see what there is for dinner, first." Helen's interest in the next meal reasserted itself, and she examined the menu which was displayed in a frame beside the door. "I don't understand a word of it—*'Gemüseplatte, Schinken mit Eier, Kalbfleisch, Kartoffeln, Salzburger Knockerl'*—but it sounds adequate and it only costs one and fourpence!"

"This is obviously the place for us," said Michael.

They entered a narrow, vaulted hall and waited for someone to appear. After some time, Helen rang a bell, and in response to this a pink-cheeked young woman emerged from the passage under the stairs and looked at them inquiringly.

Michael said, carefully: *"Haben sie zwei Schlafzimmer für eine Nacht?"*

"Bitte," added Helen, who was always anxious to prove her superiority to the ordinary tourist by the exquisite politeness of her manners.

The young woman smiled, bowed, and made a long speech in reply, of which they understood not one word. She then waited placidly for them to make the next move.

Helen looked despairingly at Michael, who could think of nothing whatever to say.

"Sprechen-Sie Englisch?" he asked desperately. *"Ich habe nicht deutch."*

The young woman beamed more than ever, bowed again, and vanished.

After another long pause, Michael said, gloomily:

"I'll tell you what it is, Helen—she doesn't believe we're English because we're not wearing fancy dress."

Just then an elderly woman emerged from the dark passage. She was extremely fat and had faded fair hair dressed in gay curls around her forehead. She looked at Michael and Helen appraisingly out of little twinkling eyes set in the fat folds of her face.

Michael began again, painstakingly: "*Haben sie——*"

She interrupted him with a gesture of her plump hand, which was covered with turquoise rings.

"You are English, yes? You want rooms here? I am Frau Hofer. I own this hotel. I will show you the rooms and tell you the prices. The rooms are very good. You come with me." Beckoning to them to follow, she marched, panting, up the stairs.

Five minutes later they were downstairs again. They had taken two rooms for a surprisingly small sum of money at the top of the house, overlooking the Getreide-gasse. Each room contained a large bed with an enormous duvet, a washhand-stand, a chair, and nothing else whatever, except that Helen's room was supplied with the additional luxury of a *prie-dieu*.

In the hall Frau Hofer addressed them in her genial but commanding tones, which it seemed impossible to disobey.

"Now, you must have dinner. Afterwards, you can walk a little in the town and perhaps sit for a short time in a café, and then you go to bed, because you have travelled all last night. In the morning,

you go immediately to the Festspiele bureau to get your tickets for the Festspielhaus and for the concerts. It is necessary to go at once, or you will have to buy more expensive seats. After that you can walk about and amuse yourselves. Here is the dining-room."

Michael was reminded of a governess who had ruled over his life before he went to a preparatory school. She had been a good deal less tyrannical than Frau Hofer. He said, helplessly: "But our luggage is at the station——"

"Ah!" cried Frau Hofer, striking an attitude, "the luggages! I forgot about them." She clapped her hands, and the plump young woman appeared. She turned to Michael. "You go with Rosa to the end of the Getreide-gasse and she will send a *Dienst-man* to the station. You give him your paper for the luggages and he will bring them here in his push-ing-cart." She practically shoved Michael and the beaming Rosa down the steps into the street.

Michael returned a few moments later looking bewildered and joined Helen in the dining-room.

"They have the most peculiar customs in this town," he said. "I was taken by the housemaid to that place at this end of the bridge where there are half a dozen men who are sort of outside-porters wait-ing for jobs. She told him what to do and I gave him the check for the luggage, and off he went with a hand-barrow to the station. The odd thing about the man was that he had a porter's cap with *Dienstman* written on it. They all had."

"And what does *Dienstman* mean?" Helen asked.

"It means 'serving-man'. I looked it up in the phrase-book on the way back."

"But it's too medieval for words!" cried Helen delightedly. "I do love this place, Michael."

Michael wondered whether the absence of a bathroom in the Goldene Esel would strike Delia when she arrived as too medieval to be endured. He had no faith in his own ability to wriggle out of the clutches of the commanding Frau Hofer.

CHAPTER IV

DELIA TEMPLE-CHEYNE lay gracefully on her huge bed, propped up on frilly pink pillows, and smiled at her husband, who stood at the foot of the bed with a glass of sherry in each hand.

"I was afraid that you might be asleep," he said, "so I tossed up as to whether you'd rather be given sherry or left undisturbed. The sherry won."

"Clever Rupert!" said Delia affectionately, raising herself on one elbow and stretching out a hand for her glass. "I haven't been asleep—only resting in preparation for to-morrow."

"To-morrow," Rupert repeated thoughtfully, sitting on the silver stool by the dressing-table and putting down his glass among the many bottles which contained perfumes and cosmetics. "I have an uneasy feeling that to-morrow's activities include me."

"Darling, they do," Delia answered. "We're going to Austria, you know, and you're driving the car."

"Now that you say so, I distinctly remember hearing something to that affect," Rupert said, handing her a cigarette. "How fortunate that you happened to remind me! I must tell Makepeace to pack some clothes for me."

"I've told him, my sweet. You're taking two suitcases, and a burberry loose in the car."

"Am I? That sounds very satisfactory. But, tell me, do you think I shall really need a burberry in Austria in August?"

"No. But Makepeace does. He was very firm about it. He thinks, I imagine, that you will get lost in Alpine mists in Tyrol, and that the burberry will save you from dying of exposure."

"But there isn't any real likelihood of getting lost in Alpine mists, is there? Or is it an Excelsior party?"

"No, love, it's a music party. We're going to Salzburg for the Festival."

"Are we? And will the music be entirely Mozart? How very agreeable!"

"Mostly Mozart, I think. You can always avoid the Strauss part of it, if it disagrees with you."

"Tell me again, Delia, who else is coming. I feel sure that you told me all about it ages ago, but the details seem to have eluded me."

"Well, there's David, to begin with," said Delia.

"Yes, David, of course." Rupert had already assumed that David would be included in the party. "And who else?"

"There's a girl called Joanna Nichols. She's very young and rather ridiculous, but cheerful—a fetching little thing. She's coming with us."

"Are we four going in the Talbot, then?"

"No—we're taking the Talbot and David's Alvis. That means that you will have to have Joanna with you

when I go with David. But I think you'll like her. Then there's Helen Garland."

"A nice girl, who ought to be better-looking than she is. Is that all?"

"And Michael Park. I think you met him at a party at the Garlands'."

"I remember him. Self-opinionated, but only too willing to learn. That sounds a pleasant party."

"Michael and Helen have gone to Salzburg already," Delia explained. "They promised to make all the arrangements, and see that there are rooms ready for us when we get there."

"If we ever do get there," said Rupert, with recollections of other motoring parties in the course of which they had lost sight of their original destination, owing to Delia's incurable habit of loitering happily in every pleasant village on the way.

"Oh, but this time we really will get there," Delia promised. "We are going straight to Salzburg by the shortest way, never pausing for an instant except to eat and sleep; never swerving by a hair's breadth from the route."

"And not going round by Paris to get a bottle of scent; or making a tiny *détour* to take in Chartres so that we can have just a glimpse of the rose-window?" Rupert murmured.

"No, darling, I have made up my mind, for this trip, to be the perfect travelling companion."

"You always are," Rupert said.

He had often noticed that her eyes became a trifle bluer when she was pleased, and a shade more grey

when she was regretful. He sometimes wondered what they were like when she was angry, but neither he nor anyone else knew that. They were extremely blue now.

"Rupert, you're very sweet," she said, "but this time I'm not going to side-track the expedition once. No scent—no stained-glass windows—not even a peep at Myrtle and Nigel, although they are in Switzerland, which can't be much out of the way. I shall be concentrating on getting to Salzburg as straight as a crow."

"One of the many things I like about you," said Rupert reflectively, "is your charming indifference to geography. No really nice people know anything about geography at all. Didn't you notice that at school?"

"I hate to disillusion you, darling," Delia answered, "but, as a matter of fact, I won a prize for geography when I was eight. It was for knowing the names of the four rivers in Spain. The trouble is that I can't remember any of them now. Would the River Plate be one?"

"No, my sweet, I'm afraid it wouldn't. With your uncanny good taste you've picked one from the wrong continent."

The telephone-bell rang. "Answer it, Rupert," said Delia lazily. "It'll be David, I expect. He always rings up at about this time, you know, if I haven't seen him during the day."

Rupert picked up the white telephone. He liked David Herald. He considered that Delia saw altogether too much of him, but he realized that it was

inevitable that Delia should see too much of somebody, and a long time ago he had decided that it had better be David rather than anyone else.

David's voice said: "That you, Rupert? Is Delia there?"

"She is," said Rupert, "but as she's in bed with a glass of sherry in one hand and a cigarette in the other, I am acting-telephonist."

"In bed?" repeated David sharply. "She's not ill?"

"Oh, no, merely idle."

David sounded relieved. "I'm glad of that. About to-morrow, Rupert. We leave at eight."

"The early eight, you mean?"

"Yes, the one before breakfast. Only it'll have to be after breakfast, because we shall never get any more. .We have to be at Dover at ten-thirty. I'll collect the young woman and look in at Bourdon Street at seven-fifty to see if you're all set."

"And supposing we're not?"

"Oh, but you will be. I've had a talk with Makepeace and he knows the time-table exactly."

"In that case we shall be ready, I expect." Rupert was accustomed to David's habit of giving Makepeace instructions about their joint arrangements, and approved of it because it saved him trouble. "What happens to the cars at Dover?"

"I've booked two berths in the Townsend car-ferry. I've also seen to the matter of travellers' cheques and triptyques and car insurance. Delia says that your passport is in order and your international

driving licence. I don't think I've overlooked anything, as far as I know."

"It doesn't sound as if you have. You do simplify life wonderfully, David," said Rupert gratefully.

"Tell him," said Delia, "not to forget the side-screens for the Alvis or I won't budge out of the Talbot all the way."

"Delia says, don't forget the side-screens, because she prefers the Talbot, even in my company, to your society in the Alvis in a draught."

"Right," said David. "Give her my love, and don't let her sit up late to-night, because to-morrow will be a long, tiring day. Good night, Rupert."

"Good night, David."

Joanna Nichols was awakened at half-past six the next morning by the telephone-bell. The telephone was in the hall of the small house in Kensington where Joanna lived with her mother, and Joanna's bedroom was on the third floor. She raced downstairs barefooted to stop the frantic ringing before it should rouse her mother.

"Good morning," said David Herald's voice. "It's just half-past six. Now that you're out of bed you may as well get up and have your bath. I shall be calling for you at seven-thirty and you've got to have breakfast first. So don't go back to bed, there's a good girl."

"No, David," said Joanna with unaccustomed meekness. She still felt only half awake. "How early you wake!"

"Wake? I've had breakfast and packed, and I'm

just going round to the garage for the car. Don't pack your passport, Joanna—put it in your bag. And don't forget your dark glasses and the French money I changed for you. Eat a proper breakfast; you've got just fifty-seven minutes for everything. It ought to be ample."

She heard him replace the receiver, and thought, as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom: "It would be rather superb to be cherished as efficiently as that for the rest of one's life. But it might be a bit of a strain, on the other hand. Life would be one long time-table. David's a funny mixture. He's so fearfully brisk about arrangements and so sentimental about everything else. I wonder how Delia reacts to it all. I suppose she just pays no attention to the time-table or the sentiment, and David is too devoted to complain. It must be useful to have as much charm as Delia has; she can get away with anything, almost. Oh, Lord! the bath-water will be stone cold, I expect. What misery!"

Joanna's bedroom had been her nursery originally, and it still contained the white-painted furniture and the frieze of rabbits and toadstools which dated from that period. At the moment it was littered with cardboard boxes and tissue-paper and open suitcases, for Joanna had postponed her packing, characteristically, until bedtime the night before. She and her mother, who was a widow, lived on a very small income about the expenditure of which they held quite different views. Mrs. Nichols did her best to combine keeping up appearances with keeping down expenses. Joanna

held firmly to the theory that her personal appearance was of paramount importance, and would have preferred to give up the somewhat jaded dignity of the Kensington establishment in favour of a mews flat and a daily servant in order to spend the surplus on clothes and a motor-car. Mrs. Nichols, however, refused to be uprooted, and clung tenaciously to the faded elegance of her house and to her depressing economies in the matter of amusements and dress. She was deaf to Joanna's repeated hints that, given an adequate wardrobe and the means to display it in the right quarter, she would have no difficulty in restoring the family fortunes by an alliance with a millionaire. Mrs. Nichols knew her daughter well enough to realize that she would be quite capable of going to Ascot in a Chanel model and returning engaged to a penniless subaltern. She was glad of this, but it did not dispose her to invest money in Joanna's matrimonial prospects. She and Joanna were devoted to each other, although Mrs. Nichols was constantly baffled and bewildered by her daughter's conversation and behaviour; and Joanna was equally unable to comprehend her mother's complicated theories about manners and morals, and the often very confused reasoning with which she supported them.

Joanna had been enabled to join the party motoring to Salzburg through the generosity of an aunt who had once known Delia's mother and thought that the Temple-Cheynes would be "nice friends" for her niece. Mrs. Nichols, delighted to think that Joanna was going to have some pleasure which for once in a

way would not have to be paid for by economies in library subscriptions, flowers and cleaners' bills, had given Joanna her blessing and a cheque for two pounds ten, which Joanna had spent on a backless bathing-dress, a scarlet dressing-gown and several yards of cotton material in outrageously gaudy designs. She had hurriedly manufactured some dresses out of the cotton material on the eve of the day of departure, and had packed them, and practically the whole of the rest of her wardrobe as well, into the two suitcases which were now overflowing on to the floor of her bedroom.

"David will have to sit on those," she thought, as she darted about the room collecting further indispensable articles and thrusting them into the suitcases wherever she saw a chink which would receive them. She then dashed down to the bathroom, where her screams as she immersed herself in cold water aroused her mother from slumber. When Joanna returned to her bedroom she found Mrs. Nichols there, wandering about vaguely among the chaos of tissue-paper and luggage, wrapped in a kimono.

"Darling, go back to bed!" said Joanna, when she saw her mother. "What are you doing prowling about at this hour? You haven't been called yet. Oh, God, how I hate cold baths!"

"You could always have had a bath last night," said Mrs. Nichols.

"I did." Joanna, her teeth chattering, was dressing rapidly in some minute undergarments. She dashed out on to the landing and leaned over the banisters.

"Kate!" she shrieked. "Can I have my breakfast?"

"Joanna, you shouldn't *shout* so," Mrs. Nichols sighed. "Old Mrs. Wade next door won't like it. You know she complained when you played the gramophone late at night, and now she's certain to complain because you scream in the early morning."

"But I don't always scream in the early morning," said Joanna reasonably. "In fact, never, except when I'm starting on a journey at half-past seven and the bath-water's cold and I want some breakfast to encourage me before I start." She combed out her curls and began twisting them round her finger one by one with extreme rapidity.

"How that reminds me of the way we used to do our hair about the time when I was engaged to your father," said Mrs. Nichols placidly, sitting on the bed and watching her daughter. "'Merry Widow curls' they were called. Only hair was long then and the curls were higher up—masses of them. Have you packed your tooth-brush?"

"Not yet," said Joanna, "because I haven't cleaned my teeth. Oh, good! here's my breakfast. Have a cup of tea, Mother, there's masses. Kate won't give you yours till eight."

"But there's only one cup," Mrs. Nichols objected. "I don't want to bring Kate all the way up from the basement."

"Have mine, then, and I'll drink out of the tooth-glass," said Joanna, who was indifferent to details of this sort.

"I can't think, darling, how you can be so slovenly," said Mrs. Nichols, accepting Joanna's cup and watching with disapproval while she drank out of the tooth-glass. "When you were a little girl in Nurse's day you were always so particular. However, I dare say it's just as well, as I suppose you'll have to rough it quite a lot on this trip."

Joanna could not imagine Delia roughing it on her motoring expeditions abroad. She sat beside her mother on the bed with the tray between them and ate a boiled egg and some toast and marmalade.

Mrs. Nichols drank her tea with benevolent aloofness, and then suddenly remarked: "Isn't that my evening coat, Joanna, sticking out of the brown suitcase?"

Joanna nodded. "Yes, darling. I thought you wouldn't mind. Nobody wants evening coats in London in August."

"But what's the matter with your own evening coat?"

"I hate it, that's all. Oh, Lord! here's David Herald in the car." Joanna leaned out of the window and waved frantically. "Come upstairs, David, and bounce on my luggage for me!" she shrieked.

"*Joanna!*" Mrs. Nichols moaned. "Just think of Mrs. Wade next door——"

"Not if I can help it, I won't," Joanna answered, clapping a very small hat on to the side of her head and stuffing into a sponge-bag her tooth-brush, a bottle of Eno's, a cake of blanco, some tins of tooth-powder and shoe-polish and a very large sponge. "This'll just

have to go loose in the car," she added, seeing that it was clearly impossible to fit the now bulging sponge-bag into either of the suitcases. "You'd better dart back to your room, duckie, if you don't want to meet David Herald in your dressing-gown. He's coming up here to deal with the luggage."

"I have no objection to meeting him in my dressing-gown," said Mrs. Nichols fretfully. "It's my nice one, just back from the cleaners. Are you sure you've got everything, darling? Your mackintosh? Your passport? Milk of Magnesia?"

David appeared in the doorway. Joanna introduced him.

"David Herald—my mother," she said. "Can you be very firm with those suitcases, David? Don't stand any nonsense—they *will* shut even when they're as full as that."

"My evening coat!" cried Mrs. Nichols in sudden anguish, as David leapt up and down on the brown suitcase. "It'll *never* be the same again. Oh, do be gentle with that one, Mr. Herald!"

"Gentleness," said David, snapping the locks, "would never have got that lid down. I hope I haven't ruined a treasure, though. I'm so sorry. You shouldn't have lent it to Joanna."

"I didn't," said Mrs. Nichols, "she took it."

"Never mind, poppet," Joanna consoled her. "You can wear my fox fur instead while I'm away. Don't forget," she added, "or the moths might get it. Come on, David." She embraced Mrs. Nichols fondly but abruptly. "Mind you write to me at the poste

restante, duckie. Don't catch cold and always look under the bed to see if there's a burglar——"

"You know I always do," said Mrs. Nichols. "Enjoy yourself, darling. I won't come down to the door; it would look so odd in my dressing-gown. If there's any more tea in your pot I shall have another cup and take it back to bed with me. Good-bye, Mr. Herald. I'm sure you'll have a wonderfully musical time in Austria."

David strapped Joanna's suitcases to the luggage-grid with extreme neatness and stowed her sponge-bag with a disapproving frown in a pocket of the car. They set off for Bourdon Street.

Beyond the Temple-Cheynes' house in Bourdon Street stood the Talbot. Makepeace, acting on David's instructions, had fetched it from the garage. Delia, in a pink *peignoir*, greeted them out of her bedroom window.

"Rupert's having breakfast," she said. "Isn't it extraordinary?"

"Doesn't he usually?" Joanna inquired.

"Not at a quarter to eight, he doesn't. He's all packed, too, and I'm getting on nicely. There's only my hat-box left to do."

"Have you had your bath?" David asked suspiciously.

"Not yet; I'm just going to. Makepeace has turned it on for me. I do think we're doing well, don't you, David?"

"Pretty fair," said David, "but hadn't I better come in and pack your hat-box for you while you're in your

bath? Then there might be some chance of your getting away in time to catch the boat."

"Oh, David, would you? How lovely of you! Then I needn't hurry."

"Yes, you must, Delia." David knew that Delia was incapable of hurrying, but he could not help saying it. He and Joanna went into the house. On the tiny landing upstairs they met Delia carrying a cup of coffee and a roll.

"I'm going to eat in my bath," she said, "to save time. You'll never be able to say again that I'm a bad starter, David."

"Which hats do you want packed, my beautiful?"

"Oh, all of them. They're in the cupboard by the window in my room." Delia disappeared into the bathroom and David and Joanna went into her bedroom.

Joanna stood looking about her, while David, with business-like briskness, proceeded to fill an enormous blue hat-box with innumerable hats, packing them tenderly in tissue-paper. Joanna envied Delia her frivolous bedroom very much. She was wondering whether it would be practicable to paint her own white furniture with silver paint from Woolworth's, when Rupert entered. He did not appear at all surprised to find that his wife's hats were being packed by David Herald while a strange young woman sat on the bed and watched. He stood, smiling pleasantly, in the doorway.

When Joanna saw him she was so much impressed by his appearance that her breath was quite taken away.

She had pictured Delia's husband as shortish and dark, perhaps because David was shortish and dark, and she had assumed that Delia had a preference for this type of masculine beauty. Rupert's immense height and his fair hair and god-like perfection of features surprised and delighted her so much that she remained speechless, gazing at him with deep admiration.

David looked up over the hat-box. "Oh, good morning, Rupert," he said. "This is Rupert Temple-Cheyne, Joanna."

Joanna roused herself with an effort from the fascinated silence into which Rupert's entry had plunged her. "I'm so glad," she said, "to meet you at last. I've always imagined you as a very mysterious person."

"Ah," said Rupert, "that's what Delia's friends often think. It's very gratifying, but unfortunately it's not the case at all. Obscurity is one thing, and being mysterious is quite another. I have, alas! nothing to hide."

"Except yourself," said Joanna, who was still scarcely able to take her eyes off him. "You've hidden yourself pretty successfully all the months I've known Delia."

"And in a house of this size it takes a bit of doing," Rupert added, "when you take my oversize into consideration. How are you getting on with Delia's hats, David?"

"I've packed the lot," said David, fastening the hat-box. "If Joanna and I start now, will you do your best to get off by eight o'clock?"

"I promise nothing," Rupert replied. "It all

depends on how long it takes Delia to decide what she will wear and then to put it on." A sudden thought struck him. "My God, David, have you packed all her hats?"

"Every one," said David with pride.

"But she'll want to wear one. Unfasten the hat-box while I go and ask her which hat she wants, or we shall lose at least ten minutes while she's peeping under the tissue-paper and trying to find the right one without disturbing the rest."

David looked both apologetic and shocked. "Good Lord!" he said, "I think my brain must be going. That's quite one of the most unintelligent things I've ever done. Of course she'll want to wear one. How frightfully stupid of me!"

Rupert returned from Delia's bathroom. "She says she'll have a small brown hat. Can you remember where you packed a small brown one?"

"I packed four," said David, who was observant and had a good memory. He looked worried. "How are we to know which one she wants?"

"If you can find some brown ones," Rupert said, "I'll be able to tell you, probably."

David began to burrow carefully under mountains of tissue-paper in the vast hat-box.

Joanna was beginning to be bored with the spectacle of two men taking so much trouble about another woman's hat. She walked out of the room and knocked on the door of Delia's bathroom.

"Delia," she said, "do you want to wear a hat at all?"

"Not particularly," Delia answered from within. "Why?"

"Because David has packed all your hats. It'll save a lot of time and trouble if you'll go without one to-day."

A peal of delighted laughter came from the bath. "But, of course!" Delia cried. "Tell the poor darling to stop fussing and start. I shan't be late, tell him."

Joanna returned to the other two. "Delia says she doesn't want to wear any hat and we're to start, David, and she says she won't be late."

David rose to his feet with a sigh of relief. "Come on, then, Joanna. You've got your passport, Rupert? And Delia's, and the international driving pass? We'll meet you at the Customs shed at Dover, then."

They left Rupert sitting thoughtfully on the hat-box.

Makepeace, a pontifical figure, stood by the door. He said, apologetically, to David: "I'm afraid the departure has been unavoidably delayed, sir. Mrs. Temple-Cheyne telephoned herself, last night, about the ferry service and discovered that the boat doesn't sail till eleven o'clock."

"Oh, damn!" said David. "I'm afraid I've tried that dodge too often before. Well, do your best, Makepeace."

"Certainly, sir. All the luggage is already in the car with the exception of one or two small objects which Mrs. Temple-Cheyne has not yet finished packing."

David smiled at the description of Delia's hat-box. "Would it be advisable, sir, to pack some picnic requisites in the car?"

"It wouldn't be a bad thing to have one or two knives and a corkscrew and four glasses," David answered, thinking that picnic was a horrible word to apply to the meals of fruit and cheese and wine which they would eat by the wayside, but thanking heaven for the efficiency of Makepeace. He had always found Makepeace a kindred spirit in that respect, and Makepeace, who regarded his employers as two well-bred lunatics, was often glad to consult him about details which they refused to consider.

David and Joanna drove rapidly and peacefully to Dover in the Alvis. They took their place in a long line of cars drawn up outside the Customs shed. Joanna was rather subdued. She was still feeling slightly unbalanced by the unexpected and overwhelming charm of Rupert. David liked her better in this unusually meek mood than he did when she was busy being the life and soul of a party, which was her normal way of behaving even when it was a party *à deux*. He began to think that she would make quite an acceptable companion during those times when Delia would be in the Talbot with Rupert. On all their previous trips abroad, Delia had divided her time with scrupulous accuracy between him and her husband, and he saw no reason to hope that on this trip he would be blessed with more than his fair share of her company in the Alvis. He decided that Joanna would help to make the time pass quite pleasantly in the intervals between

the perfect periods when Delia graced the Alvis with her presence.

Joanna, for her part, was thinking that David would be really rather a charming young man if he were not so desperately efficient, and that he had an agreeable voice and was far more peaceful and companionable alone than he was in company—especially in Delia's company. It was unfortunate for him, she thought, that in appearance he should suffer so much from comparison with the god-like Rupert. Rupert's height made David look stocky; Rupert's dazzling fairness made him look swarthy; Rupert's perfect features made him look a little like an intelligent monkey. However, it was not David's fault that Delia should have so extravagantly decorative a husband that he appeared ordinary by contrast, and if one forgot about Rupert, provided that anyone who had once seen Rupert could ever forget about him for an instant, David was well enough in his way. Joanna reflected that he would make a very pleasant companion during those hours when, banished to the Alvis by Delia's devotion to wifely duty, she would be deprived of Rupert's society. She hoped that they would not be frequent or long.

Formalities over in the Customs shed, they drove on to the quay and awaited the turn of the Alvis for embarkation. David was noticeably restless. He kept his eyes fixed eagerly on the approach to the quay. At last he uttered a shout of welcome. The Talbot drove up alongside them and Delia, hatless and happy, descended from the seat by Rupert's side, clasping a great bunch of roses.

"Look!" she said. "Aren't these perfect? I got them from a farm near Canterbury where I once had tea—it was hardly out of the way at all, and Rupert was an angel and didn't mind in the least."

"Really, darling," said David, made irritable by his relief at their arrival in time, "you're quite hopeless. You might easily have missed the boat. And what on earth do you want those roses for, on a journey?"

"To smell, of course," said Delia, blissfully burying her nose in them.

CHAPTER V

A LARGE number of cars was being taken across to Calais that day by the Townsend Ferry; and the Talbot, being the last car on board, was also the last to be disembarked. Delia was hurt when she realized this. The year before, she said, she clearly remembered that the opposite had been the case, and maintained that she had made a point of arriving at Dover only just before the boat sailed, in order to have the advantage of the Talbot being the last car to be embarked and the first to be disembarked. When David pointed out to her that cars are never piled up one on top of the other in a ship's hold, and that therefore her memory must be at fault, she had replied that different systems of shipping cars were doubtless tried every year, and that in any case the obvious thing to do would be to have luncheon. This suggestion was well received. Joanna was already bored with the extremely depressing surroundings of the Gare Maritime at Calais, and Rupert was talking politics with an old man who sold post cards; but the conversation was unsatisfactory because the old man was extremely deaf, and Rupert could never bring himself to shout, in any circumstances. Delia had been hovering on the edge of the quay ever since they had landed, watching with intense excitement the

cars, which swung like toys over her head as they were hoisted out of the ship's well by the derrick and deposited gently on shore. David, in an agony of apprehension, had been watching Delia watch the motor-cars, terrified lest the mechanism should fail, or the chains break and Delia, gazing trustfully heavenwards, should be crushed by a gigantic Panhard or Daimler falling from the skies. He therefore welcomed Delia's suggestion that they should have luncheon. Collecting Rupert and Joanna, they left the melancholy Gare Maritime and walked into the middle of the town.

Delia led them to a restaurant in a corner of the Place d'Armes.

"This is the place where we always have the most perfect *moules marinières*," she said. "You remember them, Rupert?"

Rupert said: "Very well indeed. But it's August."

"Oh!" said Delia, "like oysters? Never mind. We'll have them, all the same. Food abroad never makes one ill, because it's all insanitary anyhow, and nobody fusses. It's only in England, where people are always looking for R's in months and maggots in salads, that they get food-poisoning. Let's order our *moules* and chance it."

"A suicide pact?" Rupert inquired. "Very well. Include me, please."

"It's insane, of course," said David, looking worried; "but if you're determined to eat them, Delia, we may as well all perish together."

"I won't," said Joanna suddenly. "I shall have

eggs. They *are* safe in August, in spite of their shells."

"I suppose you realize," said David, "that, as the only survivor, you will have to make the funeral arrangements?"

"It is very risky for an Englishman to die in France," Rupert said seriously, "because the French like to have a shot at getting death duties. The English Treasury, of course, insists on getting them, too. In the end, there's nothing left."

"It does away with almost all the pleasure of dying abroad, in fact," remarked Delia.

"Almost. But there is a way out. One's death must be concealed, at all costs, from the French authorities until the deceased is safely landed at Dover. It's done by two people supporting the body in an upright position and walking it on board the Channel steamer."

"Your job, Joanna," David pointed out.

"That's all very well," said Joanna; "but with three of you it's not going to be so easy. It means that I shall have to bribe six toughs in Calais to support the bodies——"

"And a venal doctor," Rupert put in, "to give the thing an air."

"——and conduct a procession of corpses on board the boat. It would be a terrific responsibility. I should be certain to give the show away by laughing."

"Yes," said David, "I expect you would."

"It's a pity, really, that it's you who are eating these things, David, and not Joanna," Rupert said. "With

your uncanny efficiency about making arrangements you'd have been in your element. You could have wired to Makepeace to meet the procession at Dover, and between the two of you the whole thing would have gone off like clockwork. I'm sorry, in a way, that you are going to be one of the victims."

David's taste for necrophily in singing did not extend to conversations which included Delia. He changed the subject.

"Where shall we aim at stopping for the night?"

"Let's aim at somewhere rather near," said Delia. "And then, if we only get there, we shan't be nearly as disappointed as we should be if we aimed at Rheims, for instance, and only got as far as Arras."

"On the other hand, we might aim at Laon and make a point of getting there." David had no real hope of getting Delia past all of the many minor attractions in the form of villages and villagers, churches and *curés*, cafés and their patrons, not to speak of children, wild flowers and livestock, which would offer themselves for inspection on a journey of a hundred and eighty miles; but in his capacity of acknowledged courier to the party, he believed in making a show of forcing the pace. He took all his responsibilities very seriously.

"I know," said Delia, with an air of settling the matter. "We'll go very fast in the direction of Laon until we get there or until we're tired of motoring. I shall go in the Alvis, because I was in the Talbot this morning."

David was so much pleased by the prospect of Delia's

company in his car that he made no comment on her characteristic plans for the afternoon's run. Joanna, too, was delighted with the arrangement. Their destination mattered nothing to her. She was concerned merely with the fact that she was to spend several hours in the Talbot, being driven by Rupert along straight French roads on a fine summer's afternoon, with Rupert's miraculous profile in full view during the entire time. "No girl," thought Joanna exultantly, "could wish for more."

Rupert, who was thinking of something else, nodded his usual acquiescence to the arrangement.

They returned to the quay, where the two cars now stood side by side. David completed the formalities with the Customs officer, in his atrocious but determined French. Rupert, who spoke French perfectly, sat, smiling agreeably, at the wheel of the Talbot until David had finished and they were free to drive away. David then took great pains to make the Alvis comfortable for Delia. He erected side-screens, he produced two cushions from the back of the car, and spread a duster on the floor to protect her shoes from possible contact with dust or grease. Joanna, watching these preparations, felt irritated. None of them had been made for her benefit on the way to Dover in the morning. She remembered the matter of the rug on the drive back from Hampstead. Delia's effortless knack of exacting so much consideration struck her as being not only enviable, but a trifle exasperating. Then, she reminded herself that Delia would spend the afternoon in the company of David, who was, after

all, shortish and not unlike a monkey, while she, Joanna, would spend it with Rupert. Moreover, she would be enjoying the superior comforts of a coupé, while Delia, in spite of side-screens and smoked glasses, would be subjected to a degree of exposure inevitable in a car designed more for speed than for cosiness. She decided that Delia deserved all the side-screens and cushions that she could get—from David.

She got into the Talbot and sat down beside Rupert, who was looking at a map. He folded his map carefully and gave it to her, indicating a certain road.

"We follow that," he said. "Keep your thumb on it, and look out for the forks."

Joanna was trying to concoct a joke about forks when she observed with surprise that Rupert was opening the sunshine roof and all the windows. Having done this, he lit a cigarette, put on his hat, and drove away.

When David saw them disappearing from the Quai Paul Devot he shouted something after them and waved repeatedly. Joanna thought that perhaps she had better draw Rupert's attention to this. She said, a little diffidently, because she was somewhat in awe of him:

"David's waving at us, Rupert. I think he wants to tell you something."

"Probably," said Rupert, unmoved, as he drove the Talbot round a corner out of David's sight. "I expect he wants to tell me about some plan. It's of no consequence. Plans are like letters, which, if you don't answer them, answer themselves in the end. If

you refuse to be involved in other people's plans, you always find in the long run that they are adapted to your own convenience."

Joanna digested this advice in silence until they were clear of the town. Rupert then began to drive extremely fast. Joanna soon discovered that motoring in a sports car, even without side-screens, was a halcyon business compared with motoring in a coupé of which the windows and the roof were all opened to their fullest extent. An almost unbelievable number of draughts assailed her, and harried her curls and swept the powder from her nose and blew stray wisps of hair into her eyes and mouth, and compelled her to hold tightly to her hat for fear that it should be whirled away through the open roof. She was obliged, too, to clutch her skirts with the other hand because a peculiarly inconvenient floor-draught threatened to blow them over her head. She badly wanted a cigarette, but she had no hope of being able to light one and no free hand in which to hold it when it was lit. Rupert had taken the precaution of lighting his before he started. "He might have given me one," she thought indignantly.

"Are you looking out for that fork?" said Rupert, as the speedometer registered seventy.

Joanna, scarcely able to see on account of the wisps of hair blowing into her eyes, bent her head obediently over the map. She said: "It's at the end of the next village—you take the left road."

Rupert nodded.

After a minute or two, she plucked up courage

enough to add: "Aren't we rather overdoing the fresh-air business?"

"You can't overdo it," Rupert answered, "particularly if you spend your life in London. This is dislodging some of the soot from our lungs."

"It's fearfully uncomfortable, though," protested Joanna.

Rupert made no reply to this.

"Surely," she said resentfully, "Delia doesn't enjoy driving in a tornado like this?"

"Oh, no," said Rupert calmly, "she'd hate it. We have more windows shut when Delia's in the car."

"I do think," said Joanna, her indignation overcoming her awe of Rupert, "that you might at least show me as much consideration as you show Delia."

"There," answered Rupert, "you make a great mistake. That's because you're not married, of course. No man can be expected to be as considerate to any other woman as he is to his wife. It would be discourteous to his wife."

Joanna relapsed into a harassed silence, completely baffled by this novel point of view. In an unguarded moment she released her grasp upon her hat, whereupon it instantly blew away. She saved it from being permanently lost only by seizing it with great agility as it shot through the aperture in the roof.

"You seem to be having a little trouble with that hat," said Rupert pleasantly. "Why not take it off altogether? Put it in the back of the car and anchor it under the rug on the floor so that it doesn't blow away."

"I've a good mind to anchor myself under the rug on the floor at the back," said Joanna bitterly.

"Dear me," said Rupert, with polite surprise. "I had no idea you were cold. Do put on one of those coats; there's one of mine and one of Delia's. Or would you care to wear my burberry? Makepeace insisted on putting it in the car, for an excellent reason which I now forget. Probably he foresaw just some such contingency as this. He's a wonderfully thoughtful fellow."

"If he's as thoughtful as all that I wish he'd included a flying helmet and a windproof cigarette-lighter," Joanna complained.

Rupert looked round at her for the first time. "I'm afraid," he said, "that you must be very uncomfortable."

"I am," replied Joanna, "frightfully."

Rupert sighed. "You'd have been happier in the Alvis with David, you know."

Joanna blushed, because that exact thought had been passing through her mind when he spoke. She hoped that he did not realize how anxious she had been earlier in the day to travel in the Talbot, or guess that half her present vexation was due to disappointment in finding that the drive was so much less pleasant than she had expected.

"David is very much better at making arrangements for his passengers than I am," Rupert continued. "That's because he's an expert at making arrangements of every kind. Besides, he has a pleasanter disposition than mine. He doesn't assume, as I do, that what suits

the driver will do well enough for the passenger, too. It's not surprising that he's so popular, all things considered. However, I will now do my best to imagine what David would do for the comfort of a passenger, and try to remedy my remissness."

He slowed down and stopped. Then he turned and considered Joanna, who sat, huddled and wind-blown on the seat beside him, looking extremely sulky.

"I assure you," said Joanna, with an unsuccessful attempt at dignity, "that if your passion for fresh air would allow you to close a *few* of these windows, I should be perfectly all right."

"But, unfortunately, it won't," replied Rupert. "We must, therefore, resort to other measures. The first thing to deal with is your hair." He produced from a pocket of the car a blue spotted scarf, which he put over her head and tied firmly under her chin in spite of her faint protests.

"There," he said, pleased with his handiwork; "that's not very orthodox-David, perhaps, but it's good Temple-Cheyne. It becomes you, too. Now the burberry." He buttoned her into the burberry, which, being very much too large for her, reached to her feet. She realized with relief that at least she would have no more trouble about her skirts being blown over her head. "Now, I suppose you want a cigarette. And if there's anything else on your mind, for heaven's sake say so, because I shan't stop again for hours."

Just then an aluminium-coloured streak shot past them with a roar and a trail of dust.

"The Alvis," said Rupert regretfully. "I take it back about not stopping for hours. We shall probably stop at the next village."

David, at the wheel of the Alvis, was feeling very happy. He was singing quietly to himself about

"The moss-covered stone in the little churchyard
Where the last of my loved ones is laid."

Delia sat beside him with the bunch of roses in her lap and wondered how Rupert was enjoying the company of Joanna. "I hope she has the sense to go to sleep," she thought. "Rupert does so much enjoy driving a car very fast with a sleeping woman at his elbow, and he does so much dislike having to drive less fast in order to listen to jokes or the sad story of someone's life."

David stopped singing, and inclined his head slightly towards her without taking his eyes off the road. He said: "I wish that this could go on for ever."

"This road?" said Delia, in surprise. They were driving over *pavé* at the time, a surface which the Alvis rode very well at fifty, but it seemed curious to want it prolonged indefinitely.

"Just sitting here, with you beside me and driving down this lovely straight road, with the poplars and the sun and everything."

Delia considered this. "It would be awfully monotonous," she said.

"Oh, darling!" David sounded reproachful. "I

wish you wouldn't make such a point of being unromantic always."

"But you know quite well that I *am* romantic, David," said Delia. "Very. Only, not in a sports Alvis on a *pavé* road. I'll be as romantic as you please later on, when we're sitting outside a café in some enchanting village in the dusk, drinking the wine of the district and watching the people coming in from the fields, and it's all peaceful and perfect. But not now, when I'm reading a map and counting kilometres."

"No," said David bitterly. "You keep your romantic moods for general distribution, I notice—you save them up for the time when we're all assembled round a tin table outside a pub. You wouldn't dream of wasting them on me when we're alone together."

Delia broke off a rosebud and slipped it into David's button-hole. "There," she said soothingly; "surely that's a romantic gesture."

David looked down for an instant at the rosebud and felt slightly comforted. "We passed the others about ten minutes ago," he said. "Did you notice? So now we have the lead."

"How nice!" said Delia. "Then we can stop whenever we like."

"But not just yet. We have only done about eighty miles so far. Let's see if we can't do a hundred and fifty before we stop for the night," David urged.

Delia sighed as she thought of all the delectable places which they had passed and would pass in their haste; of the wayside streams on whose wooded banks

she might have sat and dabbled her feet in the cool water; of the fascinating, muddled farmyards which she might have explored, perhaps buying peaches or lavender from some garrulous old Frenchwoman; of the friendly, comic conversations which she might have had with innkeepers and priests and school children.

"Soon," she thought regretfully, "we shall be in Germany, where one can't explore and everything's *verboten*, and there's no fun in talking to strangers in a country where conversation is restricted to platitudes by law. Like an express train we shall have shot through lovely, peaceful, sane France, and all these villages and places with beautiful names, and the red wine and the omelettes, and the poplars, and the people with the most sensible outlook and the most surprising sense of humour in the world. There isn't even time to smile and kiss one's hand to France as we pass. And in any case who'd think of smiling and kissing one's hand through a talc side-screen? It must be the wrong way to travel—and all because David wants to get to the end of the journey in the time he has set himself to do it in. He doesn't want to get to Salzburg for any particular reason. He's not interested in Helen or Michael or music. He's only interested in mileage and maps, and, of course, me. That being the case, I really don't see why I shouldn't slow down this headlong journey a little. He can make up for it to-morrow when we have left France."

She began to study the map with great attention. Suddenly she gave an exclamation of delight. It had

an ominous sound to David, who expected that it would be followed by a suggestion that they should make a slight *détour* of a hundred miles or so because Delia had just remembered that chicken is cooked in a particularly succulent manner in Romorantin or Auxerre. Delia, however, said nothing for several minutes, but continued to study the map and to watch the kilometre posts. Then she said: "Darling David!"

"Blandishments," thought David, knowing that terms of endearment from Delia were more likely to precede a particularly outrageous request than to follow a sudden appreciation of his charm. He resigned himself to some idiotic manœuvre. Perhaps she had left her bag at Calais and wanted him to go back for it.

"My sweet David, in about two kilometres from here we shall come to cross-roads. Do you think we could stop there and wait for the others?"

David knew that the trip was ended for the day. He looked at his watch; it was ten minutes to six. He looked at the speedometer; they had done a hundred and twenty miles. "It might be worse," he thought; and said to Delia: "What are you plotting now?"

"A few kilometres to the west of this road," said Delia dreamily, "there is a village with a heavenly name. I won't tell you what it is till we get there. I want the whole charm of it to burst upon you when you see it written up on the large blue-and-white board outside the village in the obliging way that the French

do announce the names of their villages. There will be an *estaminet* there of some kind, with tables outside it—perhaps even with lime trees and the tables underneath them—and there we will sit and drink wine and talk and have some peace. If it's as perfect a village as I suspect that it must be, and if the *estaminet* has beds, we might even stay there."

"But we've only done——" David was beginning.

"I know, darling. But we've done it very fast and very well. Now's the time for loitering a little. This is France, don't forget. It's wicked to hurry for too long when there's France to walk about in and eat and drink in, and French people to talk to and French songs to hear. And to hurry through a country where the wine has names like Nuits Saint Georges and La Conseillante . . ." Delia's voice trailed away in sentimental joy as she caressed each separate syllable.

"Damn it!" said David, exasperated "When for once in a way you do turn romantic, in spite of being in my prosaic sports car, you're romantic about an entire nation! If you'd concentrate on me about a quarter of the feeling that you lavish on this infernal country and its inhabitants——"

"Hush!" said Delia, "it's unlucky to speak ill of the French, also it's an offence against the rules of right behaviour. Concentrated feeling is very embarrassing, David. You wouldn't really enjoy it at all."

"Yes, I should," David said. "I love scenes."

"So you do. Well, we won't have one in the Alvis.

There's the cross-roads. We'll stop here and have a cigarette and wait until the others arrive."

About five minutes later the Talbot appeared in sight. David started his engine again, and as Delia stood up and made signals to Rupert to follow them, he turned out of the main road down a narrow lane. The lane was winding and overhung by high hedges, sweet with honeysuckle. It was very pleasant to have left the straight, dusty Route Nationale and to have plunged into this green, silent country. They passed a field where the wheat was being carted, and a farm-yard where cows were being driven in to be milked. A postman on his bicycle nodded and said " 'Soir," as they passed, and two old men, fishing over the parapet of a little bridge, looked round at them and grinned. They drove on slowly for three or four miles, until a cluster of brown roofs and the steeple of a church showed among the trees in a valley to their left.

" There's your village, I suppose? " David said.

Delia was gazing round her with joy. " Yes," she said, " lovely country—lovely village—lovely name! Look out for it, David. Look out for the board with the name on it, just before we get there."

Round the next bend David and Delia both caught sight of the board at the same moment and leaned forward, craning their necks to read the lettering on it. Then they both repeated the name aloud, David in accents of incredulity, and Delia in accents of delight:

" Chérissez-les-Veuves."

" There you are! " said Delia contentedly. " What

more *could* you want? Now nothing remains but to find the inn."

Half-way along the wide village street, which was, as Delia had hoped, bordered with lime trees, they found the inn, and it was called the Pot de Cuisse. Its green-painted iron tables stood on the pavement under the limes, and two or three of the village notables were seated there, blue-shirted and black-hatted, with pleasant, weather-beaten faces and shrewd eyes, drinking their *cassis* and their Dubonnet, and arguing deeply. Opposite was the *épicerie,* with a faded striped awning over the shop-window, where flies buzzed lazily about the gaudy sweets and a great pile of purple plums. The church stood at the end of the street, with the presbytery beside it in a prim garden full of pink climbing geraniums. In the middle of the street some children were playing marbles.

Delia drew a deep breath of satisfaction. "David," she said, "tell me the truth—would you really rather be hurtling along the high road than sitting under these trees and soaking up the comfort of this perfect village?"

Even David was compelled to admit that his time-table had not been sacrificed in vain. He said: "I grant you, Delia, that when you side-track our expeditions your instinct does lead us to pleasant places."

He stopped the car beside the Pot de Cuisse, and the Talbot, which was following, drew up behind them. Rupert came to the door of the Alvis and opened it for Delia.

" You chose this diversion for the sake of its name, didn't you? " he said.

Delia nodded happily.

" You're always lucky when you gamble. It might have been a dismal hamlet with a few half-derelict cottages straggling up a dusty street, and a tumbledown garage and a tin church."

Delia gave him her hand and got out. " It couldn't have been, with a name like this. It had to be sunny and compact and peaceful—and it is. Just look at that child, with eyes like a spaniel, eating those plums! "

David and Delia were somewhat surprised to see Joanna draped in Rupert's burberry and wearing his blue-spotted scarf tied under her chin like a fisher-girl. Joanna, who had recovered her good spirits since she had been thus protected from the rush of air in the Talbot, explained the reason for these garments while she removed them with David's help. Delia was sympathetic.

" The only thing to do," she said, " is to go to sleep. Then it doesn't matter if one's hair is flapping all over one's face. I tell Rupert that if he wants conversation he must shut a few windows, and if he wants fresh air he must put up with a slumbering passenger. He always chooses the fresh air."

" But then you have no idea how charming you look asleep, with your hair blowing about, Delia," Rupert remarked. " A sort of sleeping mænad—most engaging."

" What wine does one drink in this village, do you

suppose? " David asked, moving towards one of the green iron tables.

" The *patron* will tell us." Rupert went to the door of the Pot de Cuisse, and immediately a beaming elderly Frenchman, with a beard and a white apron, appeared in the doorway.

" Le vin du pays? Mais parfaitement. Ici nous avons le Champagne nature rouge. C'est excellent comme vin ordinaire. Si monsieur désire quelque chose de tout-à-fait spécial, j'ai dans ma cave quelques bouteilles de Charmes Chambertin. Ça coûte un peu cher "—he made an apologetic gesture—" en effet, c'est vingt-cinq francs le bouteille—mais quelle bouquet! Quelle délicatesse! Monsieur le curé, qui est un peu connaisseur, s'en raffole! "

After some further conversation with this agreeable person on the subject of wine and food, Rupert joined the others at their table.

" We shall be obliged to dine here," he said. " We are now going to assuage the first violence of our thirst with the wine of the house, which is, I am happy to say, red still champagne. *Le patron* is at this moment drawing a carafe of it from the cask. After that we will stroll about this enchanted village for a little, and Delia can prowl round the church and pick some flowers and have a crack with all and sundry. Then we will return here, and under these lime trees we will eat what will, I hope, be a perfect dinner, and we will drink what I know will be a perfect wine because it is Charmes Chambertin of the year nineteen twenty-three. That most delightful man, whose name I have dis-

covered is Boudet, actually apologized to me because it will cost twenty-five francs a bottle!"

David craved secretly for beer, and would not have admitted it for the world, but, in spite of this secret craving, he was agreeably surprised to find himself enjoying the *champagne nature rouge*, the existence of which he had never suspected before. Indeed, he soon forgot about his longing for beer, and strolled contentedly about the village, which gradually presented a more animated appearance as the sun dropped lower and the harvesters began to return from the fields. Delia was so happy that she was in one of the rare moods in which she had almost nothing to say. She wandered round the dark little church, touching the tracery of the windows caressingly with her fingers, and smiling, tenderly, over the dusty bunches of paper flowers and the picture post cards of Lourdes. In the garden of the presbytery next door the *curé* was watering his roses. He was a little, round, apple-cheeked man and he wished them good evening politely as they passed his gate. The others continued their wanderings, but Rupert, turning back, leaned over the gate and entered into conversation with him. He mentioned the subject of the Charmes Chambertin, and instantly the *curé's* chubby face lit up and he came over to Rupert's side and discussed this and kindred matters with him with earnest enthusiasm. When Rupert overtook the rest of the party, he informed them that the *curé* had consented to join them after supper for a glass of wine.

When they returned to the Pot de Cuisse, Delia

vanished into the interior and emerged presently with the news that she had made friends with Madame Boudet, and that she had seen four charming rooms with feather beds and wall-paper patterned with pictures of shepherdesses, and that they must certainly spend the night there. Nobody made the slightest protest. All of them, even David, were in a frame of mind in which they would willingly have agreed to spend a month there.

Supper, cooked by Madame Boudet, consisted of an omelette, a chicken, and raspberries and cream. It was exactly what they had expected and it was superlatively good. The Charmes Chambertin was a dream of delight. The *curé* arrived, decorous and a little diffident at first, but soon expanding into geniality and a fund of entertaining anecdotes of village life. The little tables outside the Pot de Cuisse were all occupied by the time that darkness had fallen. In the glow of light from the interior, the inhabitants of Chérissez-les-Veuves sat drinking their wine and their beer under the lime trees and arguing about the harvest and about village politics and about affairs of state—some seriously, some gaily, some with warmth and banging of fists on iron tables. A full moon rose very large and yellow above the trees behind the church. Delia thought, as she watched and listened and drank her wine, that it was one of the most cheerful and the most durable and the most entirely satisfactory scenes which she remembered.

A little man with a scowl and a black beard occupied a table alone. The *curé* pointed him out as a retired

professor of languages, and added that he had the great merit of being a connoisseur of wine, and the great demerit of being an agnostic. Rupert, who was in an expansive mood, suggested that he should join them. He was induced, after a little persuasion, to sit at their table. The *curé* presented him as Professor Scélérat, " qui croit bien en son premier jugement de vin, et qui ne croit pas au dernier jugement du bon Dieu." It was clear that he and the Professor had the greatest affection for one another. It was clear, too, that between them they were the life and soul of Chérissez-les-Veuves. They soon had an attentive and admiring audience as they capped each other's stories and challenged each other to further flights of imagination or dialectic. Professor Scélérat had the more trenchant delivery, but the *curé* had a slyer wit. There was an occasional scraping of iron chairs on the gravel as the audience gradually drew close in order to miss nothing of the performance. Rupert leaned back against the ivy on the wall of the Pot de Cuisse and listened with extreme pleasure. Delia, at his side, sat with her eyes fixed eagerly on one speaker or the other, always ready to supply a stimulating word if the duologue flagged for an instant. David and Joanna, chuckling at the *curé's* quips and applauding the Professor's sallies, were enjoying themselves immensely. It was not until long after midnight that the party broke up and the *curé* and the Professor took a reluctant leave of their new English friends. They parted outside the Pot de Cuisse, the *curé* going westwards towards his presbytery and the Professor to his cottage at the other end of the village.

Delia, leaning out of her bedroom window in a high gable at the top of the house, watched them set off in the moonlight, each escorted by a decorous little band of adherents until they were lost to sight in the shadows at both ends of the street.

CHAPTER VI

MICHAEL and Helen slept late on the morning after their arrival in Salzburg. Their rooms were very high up in the tall old house, well above the narrow Getreide-gasse, and the noises from the street below did not disturb them. They were tired after the journey and their wanderings through the town, and they were not awakened by the morning sun streaming in at their small windows and flooding the two bare, bright rooms.

Helen roused herself from her heavy sleep when she heard someone open the door, and looked up, blinking in the sunlight, to see Rosa with a tray. Rosa set down the tray on the end of the large bed, being careful to avoid Helen's feet. Unless she had put it on the floor, there was nowhere else to leave it. She said "*Guten Morgen,*" smiled pleasantly, added a remark in German which Helen did not understand, and withdrew.

Helen lay on her back and stared sleepily at the ceiling, which was plastered and painted with a border of pink and yellow curlicues. It was a fine, hot morning. Sounds of activity came from the street below; cheerful voices, a horse's hoofs and a jingling of harness bells, the noise of the spluttering engine of a car. Helen decided, when she felt sufficiently wide awake, that

she was hungry. She sat up in bed and reached out for the tray. It was a very large tray and it seemed to her, as she pulled it towards her, that there was an unnecessary amount of food upon it. Four very large rolls, two little dishes of identical honey and two big jugs containing coffee and milk. Then she noticed that there were also two cups and saucers, two plates and two knives. It dawned upon her, through the mists of sleepiness, that the tray was laid for two people.

"How stupid!" thought Helen, subsiding against her pillow again. "They've brought the wrong tray." She looked around the room for a bell and discovered a queer woollen rope hanging behind her head. She tugged at it, and far away in the depths of the house a bell jangled. Then footsteps pattered up the uncarpeted stairs and Rosa appeared, breathless but smiling.

Helen smiled too, and pointed to the tray. Rosa looked inquiringly. Helen pointed to the two cups and the twin dishes of honey. Rosa beamed, but continued to look blank. Helen sought desperately for a word or two of German to explain the mistake. She said, tentatively: "*Zwei Frühstück?*"

Rosa nodded in helpful agreement. She bent over the tray and carefully indicated the dual nature of everything upon it. "*Zweimal Kaffee, zweimal Brot, zweimal Butter . . .*"

Helen felt helpless. What was the use of being assured that there were two of everything, when that was the exact mistake that she wished to point out to Rosa? Suddenly she remembered the German phrase-

book which lay on the top of her suitcase by the side of the bed. She seized it and began to search through it feverishly for a phrase which would express her predicament. Rosa waited patiently. Helen could find nothing suitable in the section devoted to requirements in hotels. In despair, she turned to the section devoted to general observations. Here she found a remark which seemed to convey at least a suggestion of her meaning. "I am alone in this place," she said carefully. "*Ich bin allein hier.*"

A light of comprehension flashed into Rosa's cheerful countenance. She grinned broadly.

"Ach!" she exclaimed. "Der Herr . . ." and hurried out of the room.

Helen sat back to await developments, while the coffee cooled. She was now feeling extremely hungry and was anxious to begin eating her bread and honey; but she was a frugal girl and she had no wish to be charged for two breakfasts. She hoped earnestly that Rosa had gone to prepare another tray.

A minute later the door again opened and Michael, looking tousled and only half awake, was practically propelled into the room by Rosa, who then withdrew, beaming at the success of her interpretation of the situation. Michael stared sleepily at Helen and the tray, and said: "What do you want?"

"My breakfast," said Helen shortly.

Michael examined the tray. "It looks to me," he said, "as if there was enough food there for anybody."

"The point is that it's breakfast for two people," said

Helen patiently. "I rang the bell and told that girl, but she doesn't seem to understand anything."

"Was that why you sent for me?" Michael was feeling resentful at being roused so abruptly from his pleasant slumbers.

"I didn't send for you. I told her I only wanted one breakfast and she rushed away. Did she go and fetch you?"

"She woke me up," said Michael indignantly, "and she held out my dressing-gown for me and she hustled me in here by force almost. I thought you must be *in extremis*."

Helen's hunger had conquered her cautious instincts. "I'm going to eat this, anyhow," she said, pouring out the coffee.

"Well, as it seems to be for two people, I may as well share it," said Michael, sitting down on the bed and filling the other cup. He began to eat, thoughtfully, and presently he added: "You know, this is probably intended for both of us. When you tried to explain that you only wanted one breakfast, Rosa came and fetched me. It looks as if it was meant for a joint meal."

Helen felt decidedly shocked by this solution of the problem.

"Do you mean," she said, "that they expect us to have breakfast in each other's rooms every morning?"

"I rather think that they expect me to have breakfast in your room. They brought the tray in here."

"But we can't do that, Michael. It doesn't matter this time, of course, but we can't let them assume that

we're always in and out of each other's rooms in our dressing-gowns."

"Certainly not," said Michael, who was particularly anxious to prove that it was possible for two people to go away on an unchaperoned holiday without any drifting about in dressing-gowns and sitting on each other's beds. The last thing he wanted was that Helen should feel herself compromised in the smallest degree. Besides, he was not sociably inclined in the early morning, and very much preferred to have his breakfast by himself.

"We'll see that we get it to-morrow on separate trays," Helen said.

When they had finished, Michael gave her a cigarette and lit one himself. He went and leaned out of the window, watching the manœuvres of the traffic in the Getreide-gasse, which was so narrow that two vehicles could not pass unless both of them mounted the pavement. Helen leaned back complacently against the pillows. She was secretly rather glad of the views held in Der Goldene Esel on the subject of breakfast-parties, which had resulted in Michael's presence. It was a trifle unconventional, of course, that Michael should be in the bedroom at all, but that only lent a faint spice of impropriety to the proceedings. Helen had been brought up so painstakingly to be an emancipated woman that a mildly compromising situation was not without its charms for her. She enjoyed smoking a cigarette in bed—a thing which she had never done before—and watching the back of Michael's head as he peered out of the

window. Michael, she thought, looked very attractive in his blue dressing-gown, with his ruffled fair hair and his slightly somnolent air. Even the fact that he had not shaved did not detract much from his charm. That was because he was so fair, of course. She shuddered to think how repellent a dark man must look, unshaven, in the early morning. David, for instance. David's chin would be quite blue, she supposed. She wondered if David ever had his breakfast on Delia's bed in the course of these motoring expeditions. Delia, she thought, would be capable of inviting David and Rupert, with strict impartiality, to breakfast with her on alternate mornings; unless, of course, Delia's fastidiousness rebelled at the thought of the blue chin looming over the breakfast-tray. Perhaps Delia always entertained Rupert to breakfast, since he was as agreeably fair as one could wish, and waited until luncheon to receive the faithful but dark-skinned David.

"You'd better get up," said Michael, turning away from the window. "It doesn't seem fair to make that girl carry hot water for a bath up those stairs again, when she did it last night. I shall have a cold bath. There's a tap on the landing and she has left that tin bath just outside the door."

"All right," said Helen, stretching lazily under the bedclothes. "You have it. I'll manage with my basin to-day."

Michael left the room, thinking that managing with a basin sounded an unattractive way of performing one's ablutions, put like that. It suggested a damp face-

flannel and what had been called, in nursery days, " a lick and a promise." He felt sure that Delia would never be satisfied with basins and promises with face-flannels. Delia would probably be unsatisfied with anything less than a sunk-bath, preferably of marble, and pounds of bath-salts and a nice hot rail for the towels. He began to doubt if the Temple-Cheynes would endure the primitive equipment of Der Goldene Esel as cheerfully as the rest of his party would. Not that they would grumble. They would simply go away. That possibility, thought Michael, must be avoided at all costs. He decided to make no mention to Frau Hofer of the impending advent of his four friends. In the nine days which remained before their arrival it might be desirable to find an hotel which claimed to be " replete with every modern convenience." Der Goldene Esel, although clean and attractive, was certainly not replete with anything. He considered the monastic bareness of his bedroom as he shaved. Like Helen's room, it contained nothing but a bed, a washhand-stand and a chair. He was obliged to put his hair-brushes on the window-sill and to hang his clothes on a hook behind the door. These trifling irritations would not trouble Helen, he knew. Helen's toilet, particularly in view of her adaptability to ablutions in a basin, was probably even less complicated than his own. He felt sure that she wore the minimum number of very practical garments, and considered that when she had combed her short, straight hair and given her nose one pat with a powder-puff, she had done everything that was necessary or

desirable for personal adornment. But Delia's toilet —that would be in the nature of a ritual, he imagined, or even of an orgy. It would take a long time and involve the use of large quantities of hot water and expensive soap and subtle perfumes, and the contents of numberless little pots and bottles and boxes out of an elaborate dressing-case. It would also entail the nice adjustment of hair and clothing from every angle with the aid of several mirrors. He doubted very much if Delia would be happy at Der Goldene Esel.

When he went downstairs he found Frau Hofer in the hall talking to Johann, who was the waiter, and the hall-porter and, in fact, everything except the chambermaid and the cook. Rosa was, of course, the chambermaid, and she also helped to serve in the dining-room, very merrily and helpfully, because, as Michael soon discovered, she had a decided tenderness for the meek, middle-aged Johann. Frau Hofer herself did the cooking. She also did the marketing and the accounts, and interfered incessantly in the business of every single person, whether visitor or staff, in Der Goldene Esel. How she did all this and yet managed to stand about in the hall, dressed in black satin and Maltese lace, during most of the day in order to check people's movements and to give advice and instruction, passed everyone's comprehension.

When she saw Michael, she bore down upon him as he was crossing the hall, and said: "You have had a good night." It was a statement, not a question. Michael would have liked to have contradicted her,

so positive was her manner, but he could not deny that he had slept heavily for ten hours. "And Mademoiselle has had a good night. Now you must go and buy your Festival tickets at the bureau."

"Yes," said Michael politely. "Across the bridge, isn't it, and in that square by the theatre?" He reached for his hat, which hung on a peg by the door.

"The Marktplatz—yes; next to the Bristol Hotel. But you must not go yet, without Mademoiselle."

"No," Michael agreed. "I won't get the tickets yet—not till she comes down. I'm just going out to buy some cigarettes."

Frau Hofer intercepted him neatly as he made for the door. "But you must not go out without her. What will she do when she comes down and finds you are not here? Poor Mademoiselle! No—you must wait for her."

"But really," said Michael, embarrassed, "she won't mind, I assure you. . . ."

Frau Hofer wagged a finger at him with elephantine archness. "You think not? But I know! The first morning—and you are gone out alone—it will be a disappointment. You must wait for her. In here." She opened the door of a little dark salon, steered Michael through it and shut it firmly behind him.

Michael felt supremely ridiculous. To be compelled to wait for Helen as if she were an exacting mistress who would sulk if she lost sight of him for a moment, was too absurd to be endured. The idea of Helen, with her earnest manner and her virginal air, being anyone's mistress was so ludicrous that it made him

laugh. He wanted his cigarettes badly; but he was anxious to avoid further argument with Frau Hofer on the subject of Helen's feelings. He felt that it would be difficult to convince her of Helen's and his attitude of mutual toleration and respect without becoming involved in explanations which might excite the very suspicions that he sought to allay.

The door of the salon had a glass panel covered with a bead curtain, through which he could see into the hall. He watched Frau Hofer while she stood conversing with Johann and glancing expectantly at the staircase, as though she were waiting to greet the dilatory Helen with the welcome news that Herr Park was awaiting her in the salon. After a while, Frau Hofer disappeared down the dark passage and Michael seized his chance. Trying not to look furtive, he emerged into the hall with his hat and hurried out of the hotel. Johann, who stood with a broom in his hand in the doorway of the dining-room, watched him with a reproachful gaze. "Damn it!" thought Michael, as he walked down the Getreide-gasse, "is there a conspiracy at Der Goldene Esel to treat me as if I were a bridegroom, or a protector, or an eloper? It's intolerable! Perhaps Helen can make it clear to the old hag that this is not an idyll in any sense of the word."

He remembered that he had seen by the bridge a shop which advertised English cigarettes. While he was waiting for them, he noticed that Miss Talbot, the troublesome woman in the train, was at his elbow, looking at picture post cards.

Miss Talbot greeted him as if they were life-long friends.

"Good morning," she said, with surprising cordiality. "How's your sister? Got over the journey?"

"My sister?" Michael repeated. "Oh—you mean Helen Garland. She's flourishing, thank you. I left her in bed——" He broke off, conscious that this phrase sounded a trifle misleading.

Miss Talbot regarded him severely. "Then you're not her brother? You're not Rachel Garland's son?"

"Good Lord, no!" Michael thought of his own fluffy, ineffectual mother, who lived at Bournemouth in a whirl of tea-parties, and whom he often criticized—and was thankful that he was not the son of that redoubtable feminist, Mrs. Garland. He added: "My name's Park. Helen and I are just out here for the Festival, you know."

Miss Talbot had assumed, to a very marked degree, the affronted expression which she had worn in the train. The full significance of Michael's first indiscreet reference to Helen was borne in upon her, amplified by the exceedingly dubious explanation, "just out here for the Festival." She turned away from Michael with marked disapproval and thrust a bunch of post cards across the counter.

"*Vieviel costet das?*" she said, with the proud air of the poor linguist.

"Three Schillings and forty Groschen, thank you very much, what beautiful weather we are having!" replied the owner of the shop, all in one breath, and then gave her attention to Michael.

Miss Talbot picked up her post cards and marched out of the shop.

When Michael returned to Der Goldene Esel he found Helen in the dark little salon, gloomily examining some German illustrated papers, which contained little besides pictures of brawny, bullet-headed youths diving and camping and running, and muscular, moon-faced girls dancing and doing gymnastics. She looked up with a puzzled expression as Michael came in, and asked: "Why did you want me to wait for you in here, of all dismal places? I was going out to wander about and explore."

"I didn't," said Michael. "Who told you I did?"

"Frau Hofer. She rushed at me as I came down the stairs and said that you had just gone out to buy some cigarettes and would I wait in here for you, and how upset you'd be if you found I'd gone when you came back."

"That woman's insane," said Michael angrily. "I never left any message for you. She tried to make me wait for you, when I came down, and I only escaped from the place when her back was turned. It's intolerable."

"Well, we may as well go and get our Festival tickets now," Helen suggested. "We ought to get a guide-book to the town, too, so that we can find out what's worth seeing. I thought of doing the cathedral this afternoon, thoroughly."

"Very well. Mozart's birthplace is in this street, so we might have a look at that, too."

As they emerged from the salon, they saw Frau

Hofer standing, as usual, in the hall. She always contrived to convey the impression that she was preoccupied with some very important matter, from which she obligingly withdrew her thoughts on catching sight of one of her guests; but Michael and Helen soon realized that she lingered in the hall for the sole reason of waylaying the visitors of Der Goldene Esel, in order to give them unwanted advice and instructions about their lives and their plans.

She hastened towards them now, her fat face wreathed in approving smiles. For so large a woman she was surprisingly nimble.

"That is right," she said benevolently. "Now you are going out together. You go to buy your tickets for the Festspielhaus, yes? And you must not forget to take seats for *Jedermann*, on Sunday."

Anxious to escape, they agreed hastily; but Frau Hofer was not to be disposed of so easily. She continued:

"This afternoon you must see our cathedral. It is very fine—we in Salzburg are proud of our Dom. Then you can take coffee in the Café Glockenspiel, because it is quite close. It will be enough for one day, to visit the cathedral. Mademoiselle must not be fatigued. To-morrow I will tell you of other interesting places to visit."

"She will, too," said Michael gloomily, when they had made their escape. "We shall be lucky if she doesn't come with us and show us round in person."

"She wouldn't do that, because if she did she wouldn't be able to stand in the hall and pounce on the

other people in the hotel," replied Helen shrewdly.

They found the bureau by the Bristol Hotel, and stood in a long queue which stretched from the door to the guichet. They argued over the programme while they waited their turn.

"I shall take tickets for all the orchestral concerts, and for *Fidelio*, and the *Nozze di Figaro*, and *Cosi Fan Tutti*," Helen announced.

"What? Not for *Tristan*?"

"Wagner," said Helen, "is so noisy."

"Intellectual snobs of all kinds are worse than mere ordinary snobs, but music snobs are the worst of the lot," replied Michael crushingly. "Wagner noisy, indeed! You've got your prejudices about music from going to Sunday shows in suburban Little Theatres and hearing anæmic young women tinkle on the harpsichord in the intervals."

"Nothing of the sort," Helen retorted with indignation. "Wagner *is* deafening. I like music, not mere sound and fury."

"Oh, all right. If it signifies nothing to you you'll be happier sitting in the Mozarteum, wearing your snob's halo while I go to *Tristan* alone. It's simply a highbrow pose, of course. Now, if you'd said you couldn't face *Don Juan*, I could have understood it. That treacly Italian stuff is a bit difficult to stomach, I admit."

When they had bought their tickets, they wandered out of the Marktplatz on to the terrace which bordered the Salzach and stood looking at that turbulent river, which was grey in spite of the hot sunshine and the

blue sky. Michael suggested that it was time for a drink, and they found a table in the garden of the Café Bazar, where Michael ordered beer and Helen, as an experiment, drank *Himbeer*, a concoction of raspberry vinegar which she thought very nasty when she tasted it. She was determined, however, not to get into the bad habit of drinking beer whenever Michael did, which was very often indeed.

The Café Bazar, they soon discovered, was the fashionable morning rendezvous. Every table was occupied, and the crowd was gay and festive. At least two-thirds of the people present were wearing the national costume. Michael noticed that there were two distinct types of this unusual dress—one which was obviously intended to be serviceable and sensible; and another which was meant, equally obviously, for elegance and decorative effect. Those who wore the more practical variety had stout lederhosen—leather shorts, ostentatiously creased and shiny from long wear; their jackets were of a strong, canvas-like material and they mostly wore them slung round their shoulders, thus displaying to the full their massive tooled leather braces with the ornamental straps across the front and back. With the more elegant type of costume linen shorts were worn, and linen jankers decorated with every imaginable artifice in the way of chased silver buttons, green or scarlet pipings and frogging, and the surprising oak-leaves cut out of green or scarlet cloth and stitched to the collar and fronts of the coat.

Michael examined these details with great interest. Helen, watching him, remarked:

"I do believe, Michael, that you're beginning to covet those clothes."

"I don't covet them, exactly—but I do think there's a certain charm about them," Michael answered. "I can't make up my mind which kind I prefer—the obviously tough outfit which aims at the effect of a brigand taking his holidays in a public-school camp, or the really elaborate costume, all buttons and froggings and panache. The most pleasant thing about this form of dress is that it seems possible to wear either kind with such an extraordinary swagger."

"I dare say," said Helen, who was inclined to think that the atmosphere of Salzburg was making Michael swagger quite sufficiently, "but it's fancy dress. You can't get away from that."

"No, thank God!" Michael replied. "I don't wish to. I think it's one of the chief charms of this very delightful place."

"You'll be wanting to wear it yourself in a day or two," Helen warned him.

"I may want to—but I shan't do it. Can you see me wearing fancy dress as my normal costume? Although I must say I think the hats are hard to resist." Michael looked enviously at an Aussee hat with a fine tuft of eider-duck's feathers at the back of it, whose wearer sat at the next table.

Helen thought: "If once Michael had a hat like that, there'd be no holding him. He'd go swaggering about the place drinking as much beer as a he-man in a magazine-story, and telling me I was an intellectual snob every time I opened my mouth. I simply

can't let him buy one. All the same they *are* attractive. . . ." She had caught sight of the super-elegant young man with the girl in the Austro-Daimler, who wore his Salzburger hat crushed on the side of his head at a particularly rakish angle.

"There's that woman who was in the train with us," said Michael. "What did you say her name was? Talbot? She doesn't approve of us. She thinks we're wicked."

"Oh, but she was rather nice to me in the train at the end," Helen said. "It was when you were asleep. I discovered that she had been at Girton with Mother. What makes you say she thinks we're wicked?"

"I met her this morning in the cigarette-shop and I found that she thought I was your brother. When I told her that I wasn't she instantly assumed that I was your lover, and flounced out of the shop."

Helen blushed. "What nonsense, Michael—of course she wouldn't think anything of the sort. I shall go and talk to her."

She went across to the table where Miss Talbot sat alone, dressed in a perfectly tailored tussore suit, reading the Continental *Daily Mail* with an air of disgust. She was drinking coffee.

Helen sat down at her table, and said cordially: "I'm so glad to see you again. Did you manage to find a nice *pension*?"

Miss Talbot raised her eyes and looked grimly at Helen over the top of the *Daily Mail*. "Yes, thank you," she said coldly, and went on reading.

Helen realized that Michael had been right when he suspected Miss Talbot of disapproving of their lack of chaperonage. She decided that Miss Talbot must be won over, not because her opinion mattered, but because it is embarrassing not to be on speaking terms with one's only acquaintance in a town as small as Salzburg.

"Do tell me the name of the *pension*," she begged Miss Talbot. "I shall be writing to Mother to-night and I'll give her your address. I'm sure she'll want to write to you when she knows you're here and that we've made friends."

"*Made friends!*" repeated Miss Talbot, laying down the *Daily Mail* and looking Helen in the eye with a stony stare. She managed to convey the impression that never before had she been accused of making friends with a fallen woman. She added, in very severe tones: "Do you mean to tell me that your mother knows you're here?"

This was so much like "Does your mother know you're out?" that Helen almost laughed. She controlled her face and answered: "Oh, yes—why not?"

"Does she know you're here *with a young man*?" Miss Talbot's voice was almost sepulchral with the effort to be emphatically disapproving in an undertone.

"She was very keen on my coming with Michael, as a matter of fact," Helen replied, rather triumphantly, because she was glad to be able to disprove Miss Talbot's nasty-minded suspicions. "Of course Mother is far too sensible to pay attention to any nonsense

about conventions. She wanted me and Michael to come here and have ten days together alone, because she says one can't begin having experience too early——" Helen broke off because she had been going to refer to the experience of being talked about, when it occurred to her that this might sound like a direct snub to Miss Talbot, so she stopped and said nothing.

Miss Talbot stared at her, as nearly open-mouthed as her good breeding would allow her to be. When she spoke she seemed to have difficulty in finding her voice.

"You mean," she said, "that your mother—Rachel Garland—encouraged you to come—in fact sent you out here for that reason?"

"Oh, yes," Helen replied cheerfully. "After all, nobody thinks anything of it nowadays, you know."

"Good God!" said Miss Talbot.

"Particularly abroad," Helen added. "Of course, in England it *is* rather different, but in a place like this it doesn't matter tuppence. Foreigners think it's quite natural and the English people one meets are broad-minded enough to take it as a matter of course." She hoped, by this tactful speech, that she had made it clear to Miss Talbot that she was included by courtesy in the category of broad-minded people.

Miss Talbot, after her first shock, had pulled herself together and sat regarding Helen with deep astonishment not unmixed with faint respect. She said:

"Well! I've always regarded myself as a broad-

minded woman, and I've always had the greatest admiration for your mother's views—but I must say I had no idea that she advocated anything as advanced as this. It's really a very great surprise to me."

"I wish Mother were here to make you see her point of view," said Helen regretfully. "She'd be able to convince you in no time, I'm certain. You see, it's exactly what she always wishes she'd done herself. She often says that if only she hadn't married directly she left Cambridge, she could have been a real pioneer for women's freedom in matters of this kind."

Miss Talbot continued to stare, fascinated, at Helen's pleasant, open countenance, and her candid blue eyes, and her pink cheeks, and her earnest, eager expression. She said solemnly:

"I should never have believed it! But I have too much respect for your mother's opinions to doubt that she has some very good reasons for sending you off on this—this trip. I must certainly call on her when I get back to England and get her to put all her arguments to me. It will be most interesting."

"Yes, do," said Helen. "And in the meanwhile Michael and I are staying at Der Goldene Esel, if you'd care to look us up at any time. It's a charming, funny old hotel on the other side of the river—a bit primitive, but that doesn't worry us much."

"No," said Miss Talbot, "I don't suppose it would."

Helen remembered that she had hoped to induce Miss Talbot to undertake some of the investigations

which she had promised to make on behalf of her mother. She said, tentatively:

"I don't know if you'd like to help me to look into the matter of women's careers in this place? Mother is particularly interested in the Higher Education of Girls——"

"So I understand," said Miss Talbot. "I presume that she's in favour of it being made both higher and more comprehensive. In fact, I was wondering if, in your mother's opinion, there is any point at which she considers that it should stop."

"Oh, no. I don't think Mother believes that there should be any limit," Helen replied cheerfully. "She wants me to find out what the opportunities are here for the advanced education of girls and about their outlook generally. I thought you might be interested——"

"It is obvious, surely," said Miss Talbot, "that you are very much more fitted than I am to be an exponent of your mother's views on these matters. The education of girls seems to have advanced so much since the time when I was at Cambridge that as far as I am concerned it is quite out of sight. I must be content to remain a memorial to a less progressive period. What's more," she added, a trifle defiantly, "I am perfectly content to remain so. Don't imagine for a moment that I envy you your very surprising liberty."

"No," said Helen soothingly, "I'm sure you don't. Why should you? I expect you had exactly the same fun in spite of chaperons as we have without them. Well, I must go back to Michael because I know he's

meditating buying a Tyrolese hat, and if he does he'll be perfectly uncontrollable. He's bad enough as it is. Good-bye, Miss Talbot, and don't forget that we're at Der Goldene Esel if you want to look us up."

CHAPTER VII

MICHAEL and Helen did not visit the Cathedral. They lunched for a very long time on the balcony of the Traube which overlooks the river. Helen described to Michael in great detail how she had smoothed away Miss Talbot's prejudices, and won her over to their point of view in the matter of unchaperoned holidays. Michael did not greatly care whether Miss Talbot were won over or not, but he listened amiably enough, and agreed that a long-tongued spinster was better as a friend than as an enemy. After luncheon they wandered through the town, and Helen noticed that Michael displayed far more interest in the shop-windows than in her suggestions about churches and buildings which she thought that they ought to examine. It was sometimes quite difficult to drag him away from the contemplation of a shop-window filled with Tyrolese hats and shorts and jackets. This perturbed Helen, because it was so unlike Michael to give his attention to fripperies rather than to ecclesiastical architecture, statues of local worthies and the like, that she could only suppose that the temptation to buy national costume was becoming stronger every moment. Michael in fancy dress!—she did not relish the thought. She admitted to herself that a Tyrolese hat might

become him—they were undeniably fetching. But she dreaded the effect of it upon his already strangely frivolous outlook. She felt responsible for Michael. He was her particular friend, and she had always relied upon him to be sensible and intelligent and sane—in fact, to do her credit in whatever company they found themselves. Particularly had she relied upon him to uphold her reputation for having desirable friends when the Temple-Cheynes arrived. Joanna was also her friend, and she often blushed for Joanna's lamentable levity and lack of serious purpose. It worried her to think of Delia, who was always so tranquil and *posée*, and Rupert, who was serious and inscrutable and in the Foreign Office, being saddled with the prancing, bouncing, exuberant Joanna on the journey through France and Germany. She feared that they would assume that Joanna was the kind of friend whose society she enjoyed, and she had looked to Michael to redress the balance with his grave demeanour and his interest in the things of the mind. But if Michael were to go to meet Delia and Rupert swaggering in fancy dress, and talking about Austrian food and costume instead of Austrian architecture and history, their suspicions of her taste for frivolous companionship would only be confirmed. At all costs she felt she must check Michael's strange tendency to frolic.

"What a *noble* hat!" said Michael earnestly, gazing at a fine specimen adorned with a particularly fluffy shaving-brush. "I wonder how much it costs."

"A great deal, I should think," replied Helen.

"You know you can't afford to buy expensive hats that you'll never wear."

"If I owned that hat, I should wear it constantly," said Michael. "In this place, where one has even one's meals out of doors, I should scarcely ever take it off except to make a fine middle-European flourish with it when I met a friend. I think I shall just go into the shop and ask how much——"

"No, Michael," Helen intervened quickly, with a hand on his arm, and led him away from the tempting shop-window. "We seem to have come in the wrong direction for the cathedral. The museum must be somewhere near here, though. Let's have a look at that."

Michael seemed curiously reluctant to have a look at any museum. "I don't know that I'm quite in the mood for that," he said absently, noticing another shop-window.

"Then let's go back and find the cathedral," Helen urged. "We shall never be able to face Frau Hofer this evening if we haven't seen it."

"That's true." Michael submitted to being led in the direction of the cathedral, but before they reached it he stopped outside a café and said, "Why not have tea first? Look at those chocolate things!"

Helen had almost replied, "But we have only just finished luncheon," when she realized that Michael might suspect her of mocking him by repeating his own remark when in the train. Besides, she had caught sight of the chocolate cakes to which he had drawn her attention.

They sat down at a table and ordered some of them.

About an hour later Helen said, "Really, we *must* get that cathedral done," but she said it with considerably less firmness than she had said it in the morning.

"I know," Michael agreed. He stood up lazily and added: "I have a curious feeling that I should like a short sleep before I do anything else. It's not a thing I normally do in the daytime, but there's something in the air. . . ."

As soon as he had said it Helen realized that she, too, wanted nothing so much as a peaceful hour on her bed. "All right," she agreed; "but what about Frau Hofer?"

"I'll settle her," Michael promised confidently.

As they had feared, they found Frau Hofer prowling ponderously in the hall of Der Goldene Esel when they returned.

"Well," she said, "how did you find the cathedral?"

"Oh, splendid!" Michael replied enthusiastically. "We were tremendously struck by it. *Wunderbar!*"

Frau Hofer beamed. "You begin to talk German —that is right. And you liked our cathedral? I am so glad. Now you are going upstairs for a little?"

"We're feeling rather sleepy," Helen explained.

"*Natürlich.* It is fatiguing to be a tourist. You will, perhaps, dine in the hotel to-night?"

They agreed to dine in the hotel because neither of them had the strength of mind to refuse to comply with any suggestion of Frau Hofer's.

After a sound, refreshing sleep, Michael awoke to

find that it was seven o'clock. "Just the time," he thought, "for a drink before dinner." He knocked at Helen's door, but received no reply. "Must be asleep still, I suppose." He found himself feeling much more tolerant towards Helen's thoroughness in eating and sleeping than he had felt at the beginning of their journey. He went downstairs and stood on the doorstep, smoking a cigarette and trying to decide which café he would patronize for his *apéritif*. He had been there for two minutes when he was joined by Frau Hofer.

She said: "You had a nice sleep?"

"Yes, thank you," said Michael, wondering whether the charm and cheapness of Der Goldene Esel compensated for the dictatorial friendliness of its owner. On the opposite pavement of the Getreide-gasse walked an old man with a basket of gentians. Michael remarked, for want of anything better to say, "What a superb blue!"

Frau Hofer grabbed his arm and tried to push him down the steps. "Go and buy a bunch for Mademoiselle!" she cried. "Twenty Groschen you must give—not more. Be quick, or the man will go!"

"But she doesn't want flowers—I mean, what will she do with them?" Michael protested feebly. He had never given flowers to Helen in his life, and he had no wish to inaugurate a custom which he considered both sentimental and expensive. In any case, Helen was the last person to expect gifts of flowers. Delia, now, was different. One might, perhaps, present her with tall sheaves of lilies, or cascades of something

trailing—wistaria or clematis—but never gentian in little tight bunches. And as for Helen——

"Quick!" hissed Frau Hofer down the back of his neck. "You must catch the man—he goes! Mademoiselle will be so pleased. Twenty Groschen, remember." She gave him a smart push in the small of his back and he found himself on the pavement.

Further argument seemed useless. Angrily, Michael hurried after the old man and offered him two coins. The old man bowed in a courtly fashion, unslung the basket from his back and selected a bunch of gentians bound tightly with tarred string. He presented this to Michael, bowed again, and proceeded up the Getreide-gasse, leaving Michael unhappily holding his small blue posy in the middle of the street.

From the doorstep of Der Goldene Esel Frau Hofer beamed her approval of the transaction. "You give great pleasure with this gift of flowers, Herr Park—I know it," she said as he came up the steps. "You are only a man—you do not understand a woman's heart, how she is so happy to have a bunch of pretty flowers. A simple gift of our beautiful gentians from the mountains—it is more pleasure to a woman than plenty of fine presents. Now you must take them to Mademoiselle yourself."

Michael wanted to explain that he was not in the habit of giving presents, fine or otherwise, to Helen, and that he strongly resented the suggestion that this was the case. He knew, however, that he had no hope of convincing her if he entered into explanations, and that, in fact, it was probable that he would merely confuse

the issue and intensify her false impressions. Flight seemed to be the only solution. Little as he wanted to climb to the top of the house—they had no lift—in order to present to Helen this most unexpected floral tribute, it seemed preferable to do so than to remain in the hall while Frau Hofer held her head on one side and talked to him about a woman's heart.

He trudged gloomily to the top landing and knocked at Helen's door. Helen answered sleepily, and he went in and found her still curled up on her bed.

She sat up and said: "Is it dinner-time?"

"Almost. I've brought these gentians," said Michael, feeling suddenly very self-conscious. He wanted to describe how he had been hounded into buying them by the relentless Frau Hofer, and to make a good story out of his reluctance and her determination, but now he found it impossible to add any explanations of this extraordinary unlikely offering. He stepped forward awkwardly and thrust the bunch of gentians, tarred string and all, into her hand.

Helen gazed at him with extreme surprise, and then she blushed. Seeing Helen blush added enormously to Michael's embarrassment, and he blushed, too. Realizing this, he was so angry with himself that he could think of nothing whatever to say in order to break the long and uncomfortable silence which had fallen. Helen sat up on her bed staring at him, pink with pleasure, while he stood beside the bed staring at her, red with annoyance.

Just then Rosa tapped at the half-open door and came in without waiting for an answer. She found the pair

of them speechless, blushing at each other over the bunch of gentians. With an exclamation of apology she withdrew, her face wreathed in smiles.

Helen found her voice again. "Michael, how sweet of you!" she said. "I've never even seen gentians before. What a heavenly blue! Thank you, indeed." With an instinct for the dramatic which Michael did not know that she possessed, she clasped them to the bosom of her gingham dress.

Michael felt more embarrassed than ever. "Damn it!" he thought, "there's a positive conspiracy among the women in this hotel to make a fool of me." He could find nothing better to say than, "I saw an old man selling them in the street."

"I think they're charming," said Helen. "Do you want me to wear them, Michael, or shall I put them in water?"

"Whichever you like," said Michael crossly: she could have thrown them out of the window as far as he was concerned.

Helen sat on the edge of the bed and groped about on the floor for her shoes with her toe.

"In another minute," thought Michael, "she'll expect me to kneel down and put them on for her." He turned abruptly and walked out of the room.

Helen's voice followed him. It sounded almost plaintive for as matter-of-fact a person as Helen. "Wait for me!" she said.

Michael frowned. "She's started playing up to the gentians already," he thought. "They're the thin edge of God knows what ghastly wedge." He turned

back from the stairs and went into his room, where he sat on the bed and tried to read *Phèdre* until Helen was ready.

His spirits rose somewhat during dinner. Helen, much to his relief, seemed to have no unusual airs and graces, but talked with her normal good sense and sobriety. She had left the bunch of gentians upstairs, he was glad to notice, and wore only one stuck in a buttonhole in her dress. She sat with a heightened colour and was at some pains to agree with everything which Michael said. This did not strike him as being unusual, because it lulled him into a pleasant state of well-being in which none of his suspicions were on the alert.

They were almost the only people dining in Der Goldene Esel, and they were waited upon by Johann with particularly benevolent attention. Johann had watched from the dining-room window the comedy of the purchase of the gentians. He had been told by Rosa, in the intervals between courses, of the touching scene upon which she had intruded upstairs in Helen's bedroom. He had noticed the solitary gentian in Helen's buttonhole as soon as she had entered the room. At heart a thoroughly romantic fellow, Johann had been delighted with these portents. Helen, with her bright complexion, her fair hair, and her somewhat sturdy build, he admired very much. He liked Michael, who was more courteous and considerate than the majority of the tourists who stayed at Der Goldene Esel. His eyes filled with sentimental tears as he stood regarding them, waiting until they had finished eating a

prodigious *Gemüseplatte* in order to change their plates. "So young," he thought, his soft heart brimming over with benevolence. "So happy, so much in love!—it is touching, it is human, it does a man good to see it. It is not often that we have a pair of young lovers staying in Der Goldene Esel. She is good and sweet, Fräulein Garland—she looks up so humbly in such an adoring way at Herr Park when he speaks. She knows how to charm a man by showing him that she thinks he is right. And Herr Park is undoubtedly as devoted to her as is possible for a cold, proud English lover to be—he has a good, protective manner as he talks to her, doubtless explaining things which she, in her woman's ignorance, cannot understand. They are a fine pair and I could wish we had more such ardent young couples as visitors in this hotel. They give life to the old Goldene Esel—even Frau Hofer has been more agreeable since they came. Doubtless when they leave they will give very large tips. Lovers are always lavish, partly because they feel generous, and partly because they have a faint feeling of guilt. But I think I should be glad to serve them even if the tips were no more than the ten per cent."

After dinner Helen and Michael wandered through the gay, lit streets, watching the cheerful crowds and feeling pleasantly purposeless and festive. They were amused by the vast car-park in the square, where stood cars bearing the nationality-plates of almost every country in Europe, parked there while their owners were at the opera. They stood on the bridge over the Salzach and watched a new moon rise behind the

Kapuzinerberg. They peered into shadowy courtyards and explored dark passages between overhanging houses, leading from one narrow street to another. Finding themselves at length in the Alter Markt, they sat down in the trellised verandah of the Café Tomaselli and ordered coffee.

"I almost wish," said Helen thoughtfully, "that the others weren't coming, Michael. We might have had more fun on our own, in a way."

"Oh, I don't know," Michael answered, thinking that Helen's companionship, even when she was in a pleasant, docile mood as she was to-night, was at best only a prelude to the thrilling society of Delia.

Michael's determination to take Salzburg seriously was weakening fast. It seemed to him that it would be an insult to a town so enchantingly light-hearted and romantic to take it in any way but in an appropriate spirit of gaiety. Helen, however, clung to her life-long habits of investigation and comparison. She had already asked him if he supposed that the dome of the cathedral were larger than the dome at Musta, in Malta; and she had expressed her intention of finding out what traces, if any, of the neolithic age had been discovered in the locality. In England, and indeed in most of the places abroad with which he was familiar, Michael was usually prepared to take an interest in flint arrow-heads and the measurements of churches; but somehow in Salzburg his enthusiasm for such things could not be maintained. Helen's eagerness about dates and dimensions threatened to become tedious.

Moreover, she constantly urged him to visit museums, and in his present mood Michael felt that to spend an afternoon in a museum in Salzburg would be as ludicrous a waste of time as working out a quadratic equation during a performance of *Twelfth Night*. He looked forward very eagerly, therefore, to the arrival of Delia. He was certain that Delia would not care two straws about domes or arrow-heads. She would drift deliciously through the ancient streets, delighting in a piece of Renaissance plaster-work or a Baroque doorway, but equally willing to gloat over a shop-window where Tyrolese hats were displayed. If it were pleasant to stand on the bridge over the Salzach with Helen and watch the moon rise, how far more than pleasant—how enchanting it would be to do so with Delia. He was conscious of a distinct feeling of disappointment when he realized that the movements of the heavenly bodies being what they are, the moon would no longer rise behind the Kapuzinerberg at ten o'clock in a week's time. He could scarcely hope to induce Delia to stay on the bridge until the small hours in order to watch that phenomenon with him.

"Joanna," said Helen, "will be dreadfully out of place here."

Michael thought that Joanna, on the contrary, might be quite appropriate. Not as appropriate as Delia, of course. Nobody could be that. But Joanna's friskings would not be amiss among all these jovial people, whose festive air positively encouraged the visitor to caper. No matter how conspicuous a hat Joanna wore, it would attract no attention in Salzburg. Moreover,

she would look extremely fetching in a flowered peasant-dress and a little apron.

"I think Joanna will fit in quite well," he said; "she'll be wearing the local dress in no time, and stuffing these chocolate cakes all day, and enjoying herself no end."

"I dare say," said Helen, without enthusiasm for Joanna's personal pleasures. "I was thinking of us. The kind of thing Joanna does is making awful remarks in a loud whisper in theatres. She'll do it here at the concerts and the opera, I know. It's dreadfully embarrassing for the people she's with."

"Then she can come with me to hear *Tristan*," said Michael. "She can scream herself hoarse then and nobody'll hear her."

Helen felt snubbed and changed the subject. "I don't know about David, either," she said. "He doesn't know a thing about music except those everlasting Celtic ballads about death that he's always chanting to himself. I shouldn't think that he'd be in the least interested in the architecture or the history of the place. I can't imagine why he's coming, really."

"Because Delia's coming, of course." Michael resented David's position of licensed worshipper at Delia's shrine, but he could not deny his obviously sensible reason for joining the party. He added: "If David doesn't want to go round the place measuring church windows and counting the door-knobs in Mozart's birthplace, he can sit here with me in this café and drink beer all day. As far as I can see, I shall be doing that a good deal."

Helen chose to ignore this thrust. She was determined not to quarrel with Michael to-night. She caressed the wilting gentian in her buttonhole and answered: "We'll see the birthplace to-morrow, if there's time, when we've done the cathedral. We'll get up early, I think, and have a good long day. That reminds me—we must arrange about having our breakfast on separate trays."

"Then you can tackle Frau Hofer about it yourself," said Michael. "I don't propose to have any further conversation with that morbid mountain of a woman."

Before ringing for breakfast the next morning, Helen sat up in bed and earnestly considered the phrase-book. She was beginning to find her lack of German a serious handicap in dealing with the beaming Rosa. When she had evolved what she believed to be a coherent explanation of her needs, she rang and demanded:

"Zwei Frühstück—ein für mich, ein für die Herr. Nicht zweimal hier."

Rosa looked surprised, but nodded and departed. Nothing happened for a long time, and Helen fell asleep again. She awoke to find Michael in his dressing-gown standing by her bedside.

"I don't know what you said to that girl," he remarked crossly, "but it wasn't very successful."

"Oh," said Helen, rousing herself guiltily, "hasn't the breakfast come?"

"Certainly—and both breakfasts on the same tray again, only by way of a variation they were brought to

my room this time. I must have been asleep when she brought them, and I have just discovered them cooling rapidly by my bedside. It seems to be inevitable. Shall I bring the tray in here? "

"Yes, I suppose you'd better," said Helen, annoyed by her failure to express her requirements in German, but secretly rather enjoying the prospect of another unconventional breakfast-party with Michael.

When he had recovered from his irritation Michael proved to be in good spirits. He ate his breakfast rapidly and announced his intention of going out to buy cigarettes as soon as he was dressed.

"But you bought cigarettes yesterday," said Helen, who did not trust Michael to go shopping alone in view of his new mania for fancy dress.

"Twenty—and I'm going to buy twenty more," Michael replied. "I'll meet you at the Café Bazar afterwards. This afternoon we might bathe, I think. There's a lake at Hallein."

"The cathedral——" Helen began, but Michael had gone. She thought she heard him say, "Sight-seeing be damned!" as he went into his own room.

When Helen had dressed in a leisurely fashion quite different from her usual brisk performance of her toilet, she strolled across the bridge and looked for Michael among the crowd at the little tables in the garden of the Café Bazar. At first she could not see him. After a while the wearer of an unbelievably jaunty hat turned his head in her direction and she realized with horror that it was Michael. The hat was small, black, adorned with rows of red and green cord and a curly

cock's-feather, and worn with a rakish air over one eye. The effect of it upon Michael was to make him look like the English juvenile lead in a musical comedy trying to achieve a middle-European gallantry and sophistication. It was gay, undeniably comic, and not unattractive. Helen, deeply pained, stopped still and stared at him. When Michael saw her, he rose and removed the hat with a remarkably fine flourish, and a bow of which she would not have believed him to be capable.

Helen joined him at his table and sat down in indignant silence.

Michael replaced the hat on his head with a triumphant gesture, and said: "About this bathe. There's a train which goes to Hallein every twenty minutes."

"Michael," said Helen, ignoring the question of the bathe, "you're not really going to wear that hat?"

Michael smiled. Before he had bought the hat he had always seemed a trifle apologetic about his envy of the local costume—or at least on the defensive. The purchase of the hat, however, had made him immune to criticism and disapproval, and he wore it with an air of self-confidence at which Helen marvelled. He said pleasantly:

"Oh, yes, I shall wear it. If you're a good girl, I'll buy you a nice bunchy flowered dress and a ridiculous apron, and then you won't feel out of it. By the way, here's Miss Talbot. I met here on the bridge and asked her to have a drink with us. I told her I'd got a young man for her."

Helen was quite taken aback by Michael's temerity. Miss Talbot was not the kind of woman to whom one could offer either a drink or a young man, she thought, and, in any case, it was surprising enough that Michael should offer her anything at all. She managed to ask, before their guest was within earshot:

"What young man?"

"Only young from her point of view, not from ours. He's over there by the gate, a nice old boy who taught music at my preparatory school," Michael answered. He rose to welcome Miss Talbot with another fine flourish of the irresistible hat.

Miss Talbot seated herself between them with a bright nod. She had the air of one investigating a regrettable but nevertheless fascinating situation.

"I'll order your drink and go and fetch the man I want to introduce to you. *Helles* or *dunkles*?" Michael inquired.

"I beg your pardon?" said Miss Talbot.

"Light or dark?—meaning beer, of course, not boy-friends."

Miss Talbot stiffened slightly, and replied: "I am not accustomed to drinking beer."

"No? Then you must acquire a taste for it quickly, because it's such splendid beer," said Michael cheerfully. "Here's my old friend, Mr. Wiggins." He presented Mr. Wiggins to Miss Talbot and Helen, and ordered beer for all of them.

Mr. Wiggins was a chubby, elderly gentleman with curly grey hair and a nervous manner. He cherished an affectionate memory of Michael in his preparatory

school days, because Michael had played the viola very pertinaciously in the school orchestra at the age of twelve. It is true that Michael's playing had been characterized by diligence rather than by discretion, and that the orchestra had improved noticeably when he left, but after the lapse of fourteen years Mr. Wiggins had forgotten his musical defects and remembered only his industry. He greeted Michael warmly and Miss Talbot and Helen a trifle apprehensively. He was not a ladies' man.

Miss Talbot inspected him cautiously over the rim of her glass of unfamiliar beer. She decided that he was interesting. She considered that most people who knew enough about music, art or literature to make a livelihood out of such unsubstantial stuff were interesting, but as a rule queer. Mr. Wiggins, however, seemed to be agreeably devoid of queerness. His behaviour was ordinary, his manner meek, and his appearance neither poverty-stricken nor peculiar. Moreover, he was a gentleman, and of her own generation, and was, therefore, in some sense a support in the presence of two young people whose outrageously modern views fascinated her almost as much as they shocked her.

"Well, well, well!" said Mr. Wiggins, addressing Michael with nervous anxiety to avoid having to begin a conversation with Helen or Miss Talbot. "You're here for the music, I suppose?"

"Music," said Michael, "and fun."

"Michael's idea of fun is dressing-up," Helen remarked spitefully.

"Ah!" said Mr. Wiggins, "the hat! A very fine hat, Michael. I envy you, my boy. If I were twenty years younger I'd be tempted to wear a hat like that myself."

Helen felt snubbed.

Miss Talbot, who had been regarding Michael's hat with the same mixture of interest and disapproval which she felt towards his mode of life, was encouraged to think more favourably of it. She said, graciously:

"It is certainly becoming, and not, in these surroundings, entirely out of place."

Michael surveyed his companions with a gratified smile.

"This afternoon," he said, "let us all go and bathe. There's a lake at Hallein——"

"There's a bathing-place nearer than that at Schönbrunn," Mr. Wiggins interrupted. "Why not try that?"

"You'll come, Miss Talbot?" Michael said.

Miss Talbot had unwillingly enjoyed her glass of beer, and she was now in a frame of mind when it seemed better to spend the afternoon with genial sinners than to spend it in the *pension* surrounded by self-righteousness and knitting. Besides, there was Mr. Wiggins, whose reassuring presence neutralized the irregularities of Michael and Helen.

"It is some years since I last bathed," she said, "but really in this heat the suggestion is tempting."

They lunched together on the pork and chocolate-cake which they were learning to recognize as the inevitable fare in all but the most superior restaurants.

Afterwards a taxi bumped them briskly along the twisting, dusty lane to Schönbrunn.

The spectacle of the swimming-bath was a surprising one. It was, in fact, a corner of a small lake walled in on three sides by the cabins and terrace of the bathing establishment. The piece of water so enclosed was considerable, and it was so full of Austrians that very little of it was visible. Moreover, the terrace which bordered it was entirely covered with the lethargic bodies of other Austrians for whom, presumably, there was no room in the water, and who lay moribund in the sun, wearing the irreducible minimum of bathing-dress and turning occasionally to ensure the even distribution of the deep tan which they were acquiring. The first impression was one of acres of golden flesh curiously immobile in the terrace and incredibly active in the water.

"Dear me," remarked Miss Talbot, "what a remarkable number of bodies!"

Michael said: "A sort of Gauguin nightmare——"

Mr. Wiggins grabbed Michael's arm in a startled manner. "The men's cabins are on that side, I think," he said, dragging Michael away. "Come on, for God's sake!"

Helen, left with Miss Talbot, considered the scene dubiously. "It's not a very inviting prospect——" she began.

"Not very, but that can't be helped," said Miss Talbot briskly. "Having brought a bathing-dress, I propose to use it. We have to share a cabin, I understand. You may have it first."

Feeling helpless, Helen took the key and picked her way among the bewildering mass of motionless bodies, stepping over the solid, ginger-coloured limbs which sprawled everywhere across the terrace. In front of the cabin allotted to her she found two men and a girl reclining against the door of it, with a naked child sleeping beside them. Helen thought it very wrong to allow the child to sleep in the full sun, and she knew that if she obeyed her mother's precepts she would point this out in what German she could command. She hastily decided that this was an occasion for emulating her father in his attitude of splendid isolation. It was impossible, however, even to enter the cabin without disturbing the sun-bathers, who were using the lintel as a pillow. She said, diffidently:

"Entschuldigen Sie!"

One of the men opened his eyes, smiled placidly, and moved his head three inches to the left. The woman, without opening her eyes, grunted and moved her head three inches to the right. Stepping gingerly between them, Helen managed to avoid treading on the baby's stomach or the woman's ear, and crept into the cabin.

When she emerged she found Miss Talbot awaiting her turn. Miss Talbot appeared to be amused.

"I was just thinking," she said, "of what the Watch Committee of an English watering-place would say to this scene."

Helen, on the terrace in her regulation swimming-suit, felt conspicuously overclad and pallid, like a pale-face in European clothes among a tribe of Redskins.

She decided to conceal her white skin in the water, and squeezing her way through the bunch of children who clung to the steps like limpets, she joined the giggling, gurgling horde in the lake. It was difficult to swim without bumping into another swimmer at every stroke, but with perseverance she made her way to the other end of the lake, which was less thronged, and there she found Michael and Mr. Wiggins. Michael was sitting on a log smoking a cigarette and Mr. Wiggins was treading water with quite unnecessary energy beside him.

"Look," said Michael, pointing to the other side of the bath, "somebody's going to dive."

A tall woman wearing a red cap stood poised on the high diving-board, waiting until the water below her was clear of people.

"She's a visitor," Michael added, "you can see that by her colour. Curious, that white skin looks somehow faintly indecent among all these brown bodies. There she goes—oh! a lovely dive!"

"Perfect!" said Mr. Wiggins, who had watched the dive with almost reverent attention.

The red cap reappeared on the surface and came towards them. When its wearer was close to them, they realized with astonishment that it was Miss Talbot. Michael and Helen, congratulating her on her performance, could scarcely conceal their surprise that she should be capable of it. Michael, who had hitherto considered her elderly, revised his estimate of her age. Helen knew that she was a contemporary of Mrs. Garland, who was forty-seven, but she reconsidered

her opinion of her as a fussy and futile person. Mr. Wiggins, who had not thought about her at all, began to regard her with both admiration and respect.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARDS the end of the second day of their journey to Salzburg David came to the conclusion that he disliked Joanna. David was not an unreasonable man. He realized that, as a substitute for Delia, anyone must be at a disadvantage; and he was prepared to admit that Joanna had nice curls, a good temper, and an amusing nose. There, however, the list of her good points ended as far as he was concerned. He could not help contrasting her restlessness in a car with Delia's soothing calm. Delia would sit reposefully at his side for hours, clasping a bunch of roses and murmuring vague eulogies of pine forests, baroque doorways, sunburned babies, or any other pleasing object which caught her fancy as they passed. Joanna ignored the countryside and its inhabitants, dismissing them from her mind as foreign, and therefore unsatisfactory. Whereas Delia's attention would wander with agreeable, if disconnected enthusiasm, from the weeds in the hedgerow to the hills on the horizon, Joanna's attention was never attracted by anything outside the car. She lacked Delia's capacity for sitting still, and in order to while away the long hours on the road she used to knit, and to sing, and to eat bull's-eyes, and to make jokes. David scarcely knew which of these

distractions exasperated him most. The fact that she could knit in a sports Alvis travelling at sixty miles an hour disgusted him, although Joanna herself regarded the feat as a triumph of dexterity. He detested her singing. Joanna's voice was high and clear, and she invariably chose songs about boy-friends and cuties, and sang them through her nose with a kind of syncopated whine which infuriated David. He was always thankful when she stopped singing and began to eat bull's-eyes, but he strongly resented her habit of dropping them about on the floor of the car and down the back of the seat. When she knitted, she used occasionally to lurch against him as they rounded a bend, and then one of the needles would stab him sharply in the left elbow. His protests at these injuries were generally drowned by Joanna's complaints that she had dropped several stitches. During the third day David resented Joanna's company more and more.

Joanna was quite unaware of the fact that David found her aggravating. She believed that in singing to him the love-lyrics of Harlem, offering him bull's-eyes and entertaining him with humorous anecdotes, she was being far more companionable than Delia, who, according to Rupert, divided her time between sleeping and stopping the car to pick flowers or gossip with villagers. Joanna thought it quite astonishing that anyone should be able or willing to gossip with a foreigner; and she thought it simpler and more sensible to fill the car with bull's-eyes than with wood-anemones and scabious. She felt that in their secret

hearts David and Rupert, being rational beings, must agree with her. She no longer regarded Delia as a rational being. Delia left her soap behind her at every hotel which she entered; and would then spend a long time in choosing a new piece in some ridiculous pharmacy, sniffing at innumerable cakes of soap with fastidious interest while arguing amiably with the chemist about the respective merits of various perfumes. Instead of resenting the lack of bacon and eggs at breakfast, Delia was content with peaches and chocolate, which appeared to sustain her for several hours; while Joanna, although replete with rolls, suffered from pangs of hunger and indignation. Delia treated Rupert and David with exactly the same degree of affectionate detachment as though both, or neither, of them were her husband. Delia would ask the way of some passing pedestrian, nod sapiently as he gave directions, and admit afterwards that she had not listened to a word of his instructions because she had been so much interested in his waistcoat buttons. Delia wore floating draperies when everyone else was wearing flannel. Delia was always immaculate when everyone else was dusty. Delia was never seen to powder her face, but retained her loveliness, while Joanna's nose peeled in spite of constant attention. Delia slept on a pink silk eiderdown which she had brought in one of her many suitcases. Delia bought a kitten at Strasbourg, and then, because it was car-sick, presented it to the daughter of a greengrocer at Tübingen. Delia's eccentricities were so spontaneous that they never seemed like affectations. Joanna some-

times wondered a little bitterly how Delia managed to make her most unreasonable actions seem normal and obvious. She was uncomfortably conscious of the fact that her own attempts at originality were treated with uproarious laughter by the people who only smiled fondly at Delia's freakishness.

"No, thank you," said David shortly, when Joanna offered him a bull's-eye for the fifth time in two hours. "They make me thirsty."

"Then stop and have some beer," suggested Joanna, who wanted some beer herself.

"Can't stop till we get to the rendezvous at Grünedorf," replied David, accelerating slightly.

Joanna knew well enough that if Delia had been his passenger and had expressed a desire for beer, or an apricot, or a daisy from the hedge, David would have stopped instantly. She sighed, took up her knitting, stowed a bull's-eye in her cheek, and began to sing: "Ma honey's just the cutest li'l thing." David opened the throttle and the roar of the Alvis drowned his involuntary groan.

A few miles ahead, in the Talbot, Delia was sleeping peacefully while Rupert drove. She was curled upon the seat with her head on a level with Rupert's elbow, so that the rush of air in the car merely stirred the hair above her forehead. Occasionally he glanced down at her, observing at one time the curve of her cheek, at another her curling lashes or the long, lovely hands folded in her lap, and then reflected upon each item of beauty as he gave his attention to the road ahead. Presently Delia moved slightly, and he knew,

without turning his head, that she was awake. He said:

"In thinking the matter over, Delia, I find that I am even more in love with you than I was when we were married."

"Oh," said Delia, "what an enchanting discovery! —and true, or you wouldn't have said so."

Rupert bowed slightly over the steering-wheel. "I am flattered that you should think I combine the virtues of George Washington and *John Bull*. And yet I can't believe that you have ever heard a declaration of devotion that was not sincere."

"People do say nice things for the sake of niceness so often," said Delia vaguely, and added, "but not you."

Rupert said: "Or David."

"Oh, no! David is so remarkably sincere. I often wonder how he manages to mean all the things he says: and yet, you know, he always does."

"When you've done wondering that," said Rupert, winding up the nearside window because Delia's hair was blowing about, "do you ever go on to wonder how David manages to put up with all the trials of his present existence?"

"No, darling; it's not really worth wondering about that, while David prefers his present existence, trials and all, to any other."

"You don't feel that he's being treated unfairly at all?"

"Oh, yes; but then I know that he would much rather be treated unfairly than abandoned. To start

being fair to David now would be terribly unkind."

"It seems to me," pursued Rupert placidly, "that to leave David to look up trains, buy tickets, choose routes, and generally organize our expeditions for us, is perhaps a little unreasonable. He dislikes Joanna, he considers me conversable but crazy, and all he has of your society is, at most, four hours a day in the Alvis, during most of which time I suspect you of dozing. Like Andrea, he may feel that he has laboured somewhat in his time, and not been paid profusely. I do think that he gets too many kicks and no ha'pence. Or does he get ha'pence?"

Delia said: "An occasional farthing. But that's not really the point, darling. The point is that he'd be so wretched if he wasn't allowed to organize our expeditions for us, and to come too. He doesn't regard the trouble he takes as a hardship, and he doesn't expect any ha'pence. What he really enjoys is cherishing me, I think—and so, of course, he adores our expeditions abroad, because he feels that he's cherishing me indirectly every time that he opens a map or buys a litre of petrol."

"But you can't really intend to keep David on indefinitely as Cherisher-in-Chief, my sweet, first class though he certainly is at the job. Isn't it almost time that he was restored to general circulation?"

"Not general circulation. David is not an indiscriminate cherisher at all. He's terribly selective and narrow-minded. What he ought to do, of course, is to marry some charming creature and devote all his care and pains to *her* comfort and contentment; but

the trouble is I simply can't induce him to take an interest in any of the obvious ones. It just doesn't seem to occur to him that he ought to get married like a reasonable being, and of course the suggestion wouldn't come well from me. I suppose you wouldn't care to tell him, Rupert? I do so agree with you that it would be nice if he did."

"I am afraid," said Rupert, "that the suggestion would come as ill from me as from you. Other means must be adopted. Tell me, is Grünedorf our evening rendezvous? Because this is it."

"Grünedorf, at the Café Weger in the Domplatz," Delia answered, gazing about her with the excitement which she always felt in a new town. "Did you see the Christmas tree on that scaffolding, darling? And those heavenly window-boxes all over the station building? Just think how lovely it would be if St. Pancras were covered with climbing geraniums! Really, these burly German babies are very comic and fetching—they all look as if they were bred on sausage and dark beer to make them into bonny *landstürmers*."

When they had spent a few minutes at the Café Weger Rupert looked at his watch and suggested that they should arrange another evening rendezvous farther ahead, as it seemed too early to stop at Grünedorf for the night.

"But David thought this was the best place," said Delia doubtfully, "and he'll be expecting to find us here."

"We'll leave a note for David," Rupert answered, consulting a map, "and tell him that he'll find us at

Issingen. Tell me the name of an hotel or a café there, darling. You've got the handbook."

"There's the Café Mohr, in the Alter Markt," said Delia, when she had found Issingen in the handbook. She watched Rupert with astonishment as he took a sheet of paper and began to write a note. She was so well accustomed to Rupert's acquiescence in David's arrangements that his sudden intransigence surprised her very much. To leave a note altering an assignation with the Alvis seemed almost like sending a message to the Flying Scotsman telling it to catch you up at York. When Rupert had finished writing he gave her the note to read. He had written:

"The next clue will be found at the Café Mohr, in the Alter Markt at Issingen.

"FOUQUIER TINVILLE."

"You might sign it, too," he suggested.

Delia giggled and signed "MANON ROLAND," and they got into the Talbot and drove away, when Rupert had bribed a waiter to deliver the note to two thirsty English people who would shortly arrive in a dusty car.

Dusk was falling when they reached Issingen. Rupert left Delia drinking coffee at the Café Mohr while he went to look for an hotel. Presently he came back and told her that he had found rooms for the party, and suggested that they should go and unpack and order dinner.

"But David——" Delia objected.

"We'll leave another note," said Rupert. He wrote:

"Search the Imperial Symbol where the dumb friends slake their thirst,"

signed it "ROBESPIERRE," and gave the note to the waiter with the same instructions which he had given at Grünedorf. He then wrote "Gasthaus der Drei Könige" on another slip of paper, and walked across to the middle of the square to a circular horse-pond surmounted by an imposing German eagle in stone. Standing on the edge of the horse-pond, Rupert managed to insert the folded slip of paper into the eagle's beak. Delia watched him, fascinated. There was something irresistibly comic about the spectacle of Rupert, smiling faintly to himself with his usual air of abstraction, strolling across the market-place and leaving the message in the eagle's beak in the same casual manner in which he would have posted a letter.

"Now," said Rupert, returning to Delia, "we can go to our hotel. It's exactly opposite, on the other side of the square, you see. I must put the car away at once, or David will see it standing outside and then he won't have any fun with the messages. Your bedroom is the one over the door, with the very luxuriant window-boxes. I thought you would like that. It has the additional advantage of being an excellent place from which to watch for the arrival of the Alvis."

"Darling," said Delia, "why have you suddenly become so frivolous? It's very nice. You are frivo-

lous more solemnly than anyone else I know."

"I thought that the time had come when this expedition would be the better for a touch of levity," Rupert answered, as they entered the Drei Könige.

When he had put away the Talbot he joined her at the window of her room, and they stood together looking out over the square, which was brightly lit and thronged with the townspeople taking the air.

"Isn't that the Alvis?" Delia said suddenly, as a long grey car entered the far side of the square.

Rupert shook his head. "No, darling. There's a bicycle fixed between the front wings of that car, across the radiator. I hardly think David would have collected a bicycle so neatly without noticing it."

Delia began to laugh helplessly. "Perhaps David has bought one, and keeps it there so that Joanna can bicycle into the next village when they run out of petrol."

They were still laughing when they saw the Alvis stop outside the Café Mohr. David and Joanna leapt out simultaneously, and then followed a period of grovelling beside the car for something which Joanna appeared to have dropped.

"That will be either the knitting or the bull's-eyes," Delia said.

"The bull's-eyes at a guess. They couldn't take so long to pick up the knitting unless they were picking up all the stitches as well."

"The curious thing is that Joanna neither knits nor sucks in my car," Rupert remarked. "She simply sits there——"

"And worships," added Delia. "Poor child, it's rather pathetic."

"Possibly; but in a most unobjectionable fashion," Rupert answered calmly.

David and Joanna were now engaged in conversation with the waiter at the Café Mohr. The square was not large, and Rupert and Delia, keeping well within the shadow of their window, could see all their movements distinctly. They watched the waiter give the note to David, saw him read it, and give it to Joanna with an indignant shrug. Joanna's response was characteristic. She plumped herself down at a table outside the café, and it was clear that she was demanding a drink before making any further efforts to follow up clues; while from David's demeanour it seemed that his sense of duty was urging him to play Rupert's game, however unwillingly, to the bitter end before thinking of relaxation. After some argument a compromise was reached. Joanna was given a glass of beer and left at her table on the pavement, while David, with Rupert's message in his hand, began to walk round the square gazing at each house and shop in turn, and pausing from time to time to refer to the note, rubbing his forehead with a worried gesture. He stood for some time staring at a group of flags which decorated the Rathaus, and it was obvious that he was wondering if any of them could be described as an Imperial Symbol, and if, in that case, there was any possibility of a clue being attached to it. Since the flags were flapping freely in the evening breeze, and the flagstaffs were well beyond reach from the pave-

ment, the prospects of finding a clue among them was not encouraging. Moreover, a very large policeman with an unamiable expression stood at his elbow, watching his movements with suspicious attention. David appeared to abandon the Rathaus as a possible source of information, and proceeded on his tour of the square. It was not until he was half-way round it, and almost opposite the Drei Könige that he caught sight of the horse-pond and its stone eagle in the middle of the square. He brightened visibly, and hurried towards it, threading his way among the gossiping housewives with their perambulators, the strolling couples, the determined newsvendors and the tubs of oleanders and fuchsias. When he reached the horse-pond he began to examine the eagle with an air of critical interest which delighted Rupert and Delia. He stood on the edge of the stone surround, and peered up at the central ornament in the gathering darkness, and presently he observed the twist of white paper in the bird's beak. Standing on tiptoe, he made a great effort to reach it, but, being several inches shorter than Rupert, who had only just managed to touch it, he failed. He stepped back and stood for a moment obviously trying to devise some means of getting the tantalizing message, and then he returned to Joanna at the café. Joanna, whose usual buoyant spirits seemed to have been restored by beer, jumped up to greet him, and accompanied him back to the horse-pond. After a short discussion the unmistakable squeal of Joanna's laugh reached the onlookers in the Drei Könige.

"What I particularly enjoy," Rupert remarked to Delia, "is the spectacle of David being compelled to consult the despised Joanna, and even to get her assistance."

"Of course, when he can't reach it himself, poor sweet," said Delia happily. "That's the worst of being so short."

"It's one of the many disadvantages——" Rupert was beginning, when Delia clutched his arm in ecstasy.

"Look! David's going to lift her up, pick-a-back! Oh, Rupert, this is one of the funniest things I've ever seen."

David was indeed hoisting Joanna on to his shoulders, watched by a group of stolid onlookers whose behaviour suggested the attitude of a delegation from the R.S.P.C.A. watching performing bears. The group was now joined by the unamiable policeman, whose suspicions had been aroused by David's scrutiny of the flags on the Rathaus.

David, with Joanna perched upon his shoulders and clinging hilariously round his neck, was balancing himself with great care on the stone rim of the horse-pond. Joanna, uttering another penetrating squeal of laughter, reached up and took the scrap of paper from the eagle's beak. Just as David stepped back off the raised edge on to the paving, the policeman advanced to his elbow and appeared to be addressing to him a heated criticism of their exploit. David was so much taken aback that he forgot to release Joanna's legs from his crooked elbows and allow her to slip to the ground.

Joanna remained aloft, brandishing the message and looking down from her exalted position on the displeased policeman and the now considerable crowd.

"What *do* you suppose that policeman is saying to them?" Delia asked Rupert.

"Probably that it is *polizeilich verboten* to give young ladies pick-a-back rides, and to climb on fountains, and to make use of the Imperial eagle as a means of conducting a clandestine correspondence," Rupert answered.

Delia, weary with laughter, had subsided on the window-seat, and was leaning out. Suddenly Joanna, whose eyesight was as good as a cat's in the failing light, recognized her, and Rupert behind her, in the window. With a whoop of delight she bent down and interrupted the policeman in the middle of his peroration by patting him very heartily on the shoulder. When the astonished and indignant man removed his fierce gaze from David and fixed it on her, she pointed jubilantly to the Drei Könige, made several extravagant valedictory gestures, and scrambled down from David's back. Pressing into the policeman's hand the scrap of paper upon which was written Rupert's note, she gave him another friendly pat and left him speechless and spluttering with indignation, while she seized David's arm and dragged him across the square to the welcoming lit doorway of the Drei Könige.

Rupert and Delia were descending the stairs to greet them, and they met in the hall. Joanna was still squeaking with merriment, and Delia was in one of her rare states of gaiety so infectious that it was almost

impossible to resist it. Even Rupert's invariable gravity was noticeably tinged with benevolence. Alone of the party David seemed to be a trifle out of humour. He went straight to Delia and said:

"I hope you're not overtired after coming so much farther than we arranged."

"Tired?" said Delia gaily. "Not a bit, David." Delia was seldom, if ever, tired, although she sometimes admitted to fatigue when David appeared to expect it of her; but this was not an occasion on which she felt able to pretend anything, even to please David.

"Delia had such a long sleep in the car that we were scarcely delayed at all by flower-picking and side-shows," remarked Rupert blandly, "so we were able to reach Grünedorf sooner than we intended. An ugly town, don't you think? We didn't care for it much."

"After all, it's not really late—unless you happen to be hungry," added Delia, trying, without any real success, to subdue her own gaiety to a solicitous tone.

"Hungry?" cried Joanna. "I'm starving—but it was worth it. I've never enjoyed anything more than being lectured by that policeman while I was on David's back. Every time David opened his mouth to answer back, I could feel his chin move and I throttled him. I'm sure I've saved him from a long term of imprisonment for answering back a bumpkin in uniform."

"I certainly never felt more ridiculous in my life," said David stiffly.

"My poor sweet." Delia slipped her arm through his. "And you *looked* ridiculous, too—from above, at least. You see, I was watching from the window."

"And enjoying every minute of it, I suppose?"

"Well, we did, rather. It was so funny when you prowled round the square and never noticed the pond in the middle—like an actor in a melodrama pretending not to see the body. And when you gave Joanna a pick-a-back ride——"

"I'm glad, at any rate, that the sight of us making fools of ourselves gave you pleasure." David allowed the arm which Delia had taken to hang limp by his side, so that she was obliged to release it.

"We didn't make fools of ourselves, David—it was Rupert and Delia who made fools of us. That's why they enjoyed it so much," said Joanna, without malice. "And now I think the mountebanks deserve a drink."

"You deserve a magnum and a banquet," said Rupert. "Within the limits of this hotel's resources I shall be happy to provide both. Joanna, what will you take?"

"Apricot brandy," replied Joanna, without hesitation.

Rupert looked pained. "Not before dinner?"

"*With* my dinner. I had some at Mainz, and it was heavenly—half apricot jam and half methylated spirit, I think, and very inspiring. I could fancy a drop of that, and a *pretzl* to be going on with."

"A diet of bull's-eyes, caraway seeds, and apricot brandy must, in the end, prove fatal," Rupert remarked. "However, I dare say it's better than dying of anxiety and vitamins. By the way, did anyone think to send a wire to Salzburg to say we'll be there to-morrow?"

"I did," said David.

Rupert laid a hand on his shoulder. "David," he said, "you heap coals of fire on my head. All I can do is to add ashes."

"Not at all," said David suspiciously.

"But yes. You spend your time making arrangements for our comfort, and carrying them out, while I do nothing but put spokes in your wheel and sand in the machinery. You busy yourself consulting maps, sending telegrams, doing that irritating sum to make miles of kilometres—and all you get for your pains is to be mocked, made to clamber up pieces of statuary, and embroiled with the police. You are, without any doubt, the hero of this piece, and I am the villain. I abase myself."

David sighed. He knew that the six-foot villain who perpetrates a successful practical joke gets more sympathy from the audience than the five-foot hero who is the victim of it. He knew that one good prank wins more popularity than a lifetime of efficient organization. But he wanted to stop sulking and be friends with the others, and forget that he had made them laugh by standing on tiptoe on the edge of the horse-pond. Most of all he wanted Delia to take his arm again, so that he could make amends for having been churlish when she made her first overture. He said:

"I say, Rupert, did I hear you mention a magnum?"

CHAPTER IX

"The English," said Johann, the waiter at the Goldene Esel, to Rosa, the chambermaid, "are, of course, mad."

Rosa replied, "Natürlich." She usually made this reply to anything said by Johann, because she was in love with him—even when he stated a fact so obvious as scarcely to require assent, as on this occasion.

"Some of them are agreeable," pursued Johann, "and others are not. Now, our Herr Park and his Fräulein Garland are very agreeable; but they are none the less mad for all that."

"Is it mad, then, to be in love?" Rosa asked coyly.

"No; that is reasonable; and, if one has time, an excellent thing. But is it reasonable for two young people in love, on a holiday together, to invite four friends to join them in the hotel? That shows you the madness of the English. Would the French do it? The question is foolish. Would the Germans do it? Perhaps, but on a walking-tour, which is not to be compared with well-conducted indiscretion in a respectable hotel. Would the Americans do it? Americans travel for improvement, not pleasure; and in any case they marry each other before each indiscretion, and divorce at once afterwards. When you have had the experience of foreigners which I have had, my little

Rosa, you will realize that only the English are capable of asking friends to join them when it is clear that they need no company but each other's. It is a madness which brings profit to us in our hotels; but, for myself, I grieve to see so little romance where there is so much devotion."

Rosa said hopefully: "These four English people who come are perhaps two pairs of lovers?"

"It is not likely. They are too serious, these English, to go about as a troupe of sweethearts, like a walking-tour in Germany. You will see. There will be, perhaps, a lady with white hair who complains constantly about the bed; and an elderly man with grey trousers and a brown coat who must have his breakfast downstairs in the *Speisezimmer*, which is inconvenient because you will have to sweep it an hour earlier; and perhaps a young man and a young lady who will ask for sandwiches and walk up the Gaisberg and feel very proud of themselves, and lose a few Schillings at the Mirabell-Casino and feel proud of themselves again, and return late at night with a lot of laughter. That is how I picture to myself the English friends of Herr Park who are coming this evening. Is it possible that the romance of Herr Park and his Fräulein Garland can continue among such people? It is sad to think that the English instinct for collecting other English people in a strange country is stronger than the romance of two lovers content to be alone among strangers."

"You speak very beautifully about romance," said Rosa humbly.

Johann was quite moved by his own eloquence and felt more kindly disposed than usual towards Rosa, whom he generally regarded as rather a nuisance and clumsy with the plates. He gave her a resounding kiss on her plump cheek and said:

"You are a good girl, Rosa. When the high season is over, I will take you one Sunday to see my sister, who lives at Bad Ischl and is married to a baker there in a good way of business."

. . . . . .

Michael Park sat drinking beer in the Café Glockenspiel and wondering how Delia would tolerate an hotel which possessed no bathroom, no lift, only two servants, and was managed by Frau Hofer. Frau Hofer managed her hotel and all within it with such determination that Michael and Helen had come to feel themselves as much a part of her responsibilities as the catering arrangements or the domestic staff. They submitted meekly to cross-examination as to their movements whenever they returned to the Goldene Esel. They constantly told complicated lies about their sight-seeing activities in order to convince her that they had carried out her instructions. They had become so well accustomed to her arch benevolence that, while continuing to resent the assumption that they were bound by ties stronger than those which unite fellow-seekers after enlightenment—cultural, from Helen's point of view, and sartorial and gastronomic from Michael's—they no longer complained of her innuendoes and her embarrassing interest in their attitude towards each other. They

had come to a tacit decision to ignore what could not be prevented. For some time they had accepted the breakfast-party in Helen's room as an institution. Michael still raged inarticulately when he was waylaid on his way out of the hotel by Frau Hofer with the admonition, "*Eine Momente—Fräulein Garland kommt!*" and ushered into the stuffy little salon to wait for Helen. Helen still blushed when Johann handed to Michael the keys of both their rooms as they entered the hotel. Both of them were somewhat put out by the stupendous leer with which Frau Hofer remarked to them one morning, "What a terrible thunderstorm we have had last night! Ach—but I forget!—young people such as you are not disturbed by the thunder. You have other things to think about—*nicht wahr?*" Such pleasantries as these still caused them considerable righteous indignation; but on the whole they accepted the situation as part of the pleasing atmosphere of unreality which seemed to pervade the entire town. Michael wished secretly that, if he must be suspected of concubinage, it could have been with someone a trifle more exotic, a trifle less fresh and unvarnished than Helen. Helen occasionally caught herself wishing that Michael would not display quite such Joseph-like alacrity in rejecting the rôle of her lover which was so obviously assigned to him at the Goldene Esel. She was always careful to put away this ignoble thought, as being unjust to Michael's chivalrous instincts and lowering to her own dignity as Rachel Garland's daughter, late head girl of St. Pryska's College, and an example of the Best Type of Modern Girl.

Michael sat drinking beer at the Café Glockenspiel because he was waiting for Helen, who was listening to an organ recital in the cathedral. Michael had attended a recital one morning, but he resented the charge of eighty Groschen which was demanded of him, and, since he disliked organ music, he had decided that in future he would not accompany Helen, but would expend the eighty Groschen on beer instead, while waiting for her in the nearest café.

Michael's hat, which he cherished above all his other possessions, had led him to the purchase of other extravagant articles of attire, exactly as Helen had feared. He now wore white linen shorts, and a cut-away linen jacket lavishly adorned with frogging, silver buttons curiously wrought, and a scarlet collar and pipings. On his feet he wore square-toed black shoes, cunningly piped with scarlet leather, of an extremely eighteenth-century design; and he smoked an enormous curved pipe with a carved bowl and a pendant green tassel. He felt cool and comfortable, looked slightly absurd and far better looking than ever before, and felt supremely happy. Even the possibility of Delia's displeasure at the lack of a bathroom could not disturb him seriously, so great was his contentment. "Here I sit," he thought, "drinking this magnificent beer, and wearing clothes which I never thought to wear unless—which God forbid!—I were reduced to doing crowd-work at a film studio. Quite soon I shall have an extremely good and very peculiar meal for about one and sixpence. After that I shall bathe, and drink more beer, and sleep. To-night I shall be blown out

of my five senses by glorious great gusts of Wagner. It's all too good to be true. In that cathedral sits Helen, with her nice nature and her really excellent complexion, only waiting until she has done her duty by her instincts for culture and the music-mistress at her late school, before hurrying out here to join me. Somewhere approaching the German frontier, and getting nearer every minute, are Joanna—a perfect companion for cutting a caper in fancy dress—and Delia, the loveliest creature in the world, with those marvellous eyes and that trick of being unintentionally charming and then looking as if she had meant to be. And then, of course, there's Rupert Temple-Cheyne, who's a bit of a stick, and that inevitable David Herald, who's altogether too fond of organizing everything. But he shan't organize me. With my beer, and my bathing, and my meals, and my music, I want nothing more except plenty of feminine society—and that, thank heaven, is at hand. There's Helen for companionable common sense; and Joanna for frivolous occasions; and Delia for looking at and listening to in any and every mood, and the oftener the better. Helen will probably enjoy talking to Rupert a good deal about foreign affairs —not that she knows much about them, but she's always willing to learn, and with any luck he'll be willing to teach her. Joanna can busy herself with the interesting job of captivating David Herald. That leaves Delia with plenty of spare time, in which I can show her the town and perhaps even borrow one of the cars and take her for expeditions to the Salzkammergut or the Gaisberg. That leaves absolutely nothing for

David Herald to organize, because I have now worked out the programme for the party to the last detail. And, what's more, if that bullet-headed busybody attempted to wear a hat like mine, he'd look a figure of fun, and that's a fact. I only hope he does."

Elated by these reflections, Michael had just ordered some more beer when he was joined by Helen.

"I met Mr. Wiggins," she said. "He wants us to bathe with him and Miss Talbot this afternoon."

"We can't. We don't know when the others are arriving."

"It's rather pathetic, Michael—I gather that he doesn't like to take Miss Talbot bathing without us because he's afraid she would think it unconventional."

"You can take it from me," said Michael, leaning back, beer and pipe in hand, and mentally comparing himself with Lothar when he first took possession of the Middle Kingdom, "that unconventional behaviour recommends itself to Miss Talbot a deal more than you'd think."

"Michael, I don't understand——" Helen said in a pained voice. She found it hard to believe that the bravado which Michael had acquired with his hat was sufficient to have emboldened him to make unconventional advances to the formidable Miss Talbot; but she was at a loss to construe his remark in any other fashion.

"Miss Talbot thought us a couple of extremely uninteresting people when she believed that we were brother and sister," Michael explained. "When she discovered that, in spite of being no relation to each other, we were staying in the same hotel, she began to

take a morbid interest in us which has been increasing ever since. I'm convinced that she thinks we're exponents of free love, or companionate marriage, or some other punk that she has picked up from the Sunday gutter Press, and in spite of herself she can't resist the temptation to watch and see how it works."

"But, Michael, how awful!" Helen was deeply shocked. "Surely you don't think she really believes that?"

"Certainly I do. It's the effect of Salzburg on the sober English mind—only a variant of my own emancipation from the shackles of what you and the Americans call Culture. Miss Talbot is convinced that we're living in sin, and as it's obvious that she has never met any abandoned people before, it just fascinates her. Old Wiggins probably thinks so too, if he thinks about us at all; but he'd just feel that it was no concern of his. He's a peaceful old boy, and his motto is 'Live and let live'—in sin or not, according to taste."

"But it's maddening, if they really think that!" cried Helen indignantly. "Of course, I know the people of the Goldene Esel have their suspicions, but that's only because they've got the Continental outlook. . . ."

"Suspicions be damned! They just took it for granted the moment we arrived there. What they think now that I've asked for rooms for four friends, God only knows."

"Michael," said Helen reproachfully, "isn't your language getting a bit strong?"

Michael stretched out his legs and surveyed his feet

in their fantastic shoes with obvious satisfaction. "If you think I'm going to sit here wearing this hat, and these shoes, and, in fact, the whole heavenly musical-comedy outfit, and talk like a Sunday School teacher because your mother trusted me with her good little girl, you're very much mistaken. You can think yourself damn lucky that I don't live up to the reputation I've got at the Goldene Esel—or not, as you please."

Helen stared at him in amazement. It had never occurred to her before that Michael might be madly in love with her and nobly refraining from showing it because she was alone in his care in a foreign country. The possibility, suggested by his last remark, that he was consumed with passion for her, and sternly repressing the least indication of his ardour lest it should seem like a breach of trust, was novel and pleasing. In fact, the more she contemplated it the more attractive it appeared. Magnificent Michael! leaving her night after night at the door of her bedroom with a grunt and a curt nod, never revealing by word or glance the torment of his devotion. She blushed deeply and touched with the tips of her fingers the hand which grasped his beer mug.

"Dear Michael," she said fondly, "you're very, very charming."

Michael looked startled, and gulped his beer. "Does the girl *want* me to make love to her?" he thought, in surprise and alarm. "Surely not. I should have thought she'd be both shocked and annoyed if I did. Helen's the kind of girl who knows a lot about biology and is embarrassed at being kissed. And yet I don't

see what use I'm to make of this sudden evidence of affection, coming directly after my rather crude remark about my reputation at the Goldene Esel. Damn it! I can't start having an *affaire* with Helen at this precise juncture, with Joanna and Delia arriving at any moment. It's all very worrying. I must have some more beer."

Helen suffered a pang of conscience as she watched him order his third glass of beer. She concluded that he was taking to drink in order to drown his misery and dull the torment of his heart, and she felt herself directly responsible for this downward course. It was a heavy load of guilt to bear, to have driven a good man to drink because he dared not declare his passion, but it was a very enviable form of guilt. Feeling like a *femme fatale*, Helen repeated her tender little gesture of caressing his hand which held the beer, and murmured gently:

"You will *try*, Michael, won't you, not to drink more than you can help? Of course, I know what you feel. . . ."

"Only a fortnight more to go, and no lager like this to be had in England," said Michael wildly. "Have some yourself—it's good against the after-effects of ecclesiastical music."

"All right," Helen agreed. She was now prepared to humour Michael to the top of his bent, and to overlook all his frivolous criticisms of her activities. This much, at least, she felt that she owed him in return for his noble attitude towards her. She drank a large glass of beer, and then, feeling slightly comatose and

extremely benevolent, she decided to postpone the visit to the natural history museum which she had planned for the afternoon.

"Good," said Michael. "Who wants to stand and stare at bones and stones and stuffed birds when there are the streets of this town to wander in and these gloriously comic people to look at? Natural history is better studied at South Kensington, where there are absolutely no outside attractions in the form of buildings or people. Let's go and eat somewhere."

They found a little eating-place in the Kai-gasse, where they had toadstool soup and stuffed paprika, and carried on a long, confused conversation with the proprietor on the subject of the foreign visitors' taste in the matter of food. The proprietor explained that the English ordered dishes simply because they liked their names, making no attempt to discover the nature of them; that they always exclaimed in horror at the quantity of food when it arrived, and invariably ended by eating all of it. The Germans, on the other hand, demanded minute details of the preparation of each course and protested loudly that it was inadequate when they saw it. The Americans were exclamatory in their enthusiasm about the vegetable food, and usually offered to purchase the dishes on which it was served, in order to take them home as souvenirs. The French, without exception, called for omelette and salad, refusing, with pained politeness, any suggestions of *goulasch*, fillets of pork, stuffed paprika, Russian eggs, and all the other local delicacies. The proprietor admitted to a partiality towards the English, as customers. "They

are full of curiosity for their food. '*Gott in Himmel!*' they say. 'What is this stuff? We shall eat it and see!'"

Michael and Helen returned to the Goldene Esel, where Helen announced her intention of taking a nap. Michael was secretly amused by Helen's increasing tendency to linger over her meals and then to sleep afterwards. She scarcely ever referred to her theory that eating and sleeping were dull duties which should be performed regularly but not prolonged to the detriment of the day's intellectual programme. She no longer regarded two ham sandwiches, a picture gallery and a cathedral as a good substitute for luncheon. Michael considered that this change of outlook was the effect of Salzburg, in much the same way as his own views about masculine attire had been modified during the past ten days.

"What a town!" he said exultantly to himself. "It ought to be recommended by psychologists as a cure for narrow-mindedness. In a week it has made Helen greedy instead of highbrow; it has turned my thirst for knowledge into a thirst for beer, and opened my eyes to the merits of Beau Brummell; it has made Miss Talbot take a really eager interest in what she believes to be sin; and—most surprising of all—it has made old Wiggins take a really eager interest in Miss Talbot."

While Helen was sleeping, Michael inspected the rooms which were reserved for the other members of the party. Their remarkable bareness made him a trifle apprehensive about Delia's reactions when she saw them. He was not concerned with the comfort of

Rupert and David. Joanna, he felt, would be perfectly happy so long as she had enough bedclothes, honey for breakfast, and a few accommodating neighbours who were prepared to giggle at her jokes. But Delia, he could not help thinking, would be out of place in a whitewashed cell, which was really all that could be said of her bedroom at the Goldene Esel. He decided that its monastic bareness should be mitigated by flowers, and hurried off to the market. He returned laden with a strange assortment of snapdragons, sunflowers and Canterbury bells which had been sold him, at an exorbitant cost, by an old woman who was keeping her carnations out of sight under the stall in order to sell them at even more extortionate prices to the patrons of the opera later in the day.

Frau Hofer was loitering, as usual, in the hall of the hotel. She pointed to the flowers with an approving gesture.

"*Für das Fräulein!* How kind you are, Herr Park! How attentive! Here in Austria we say that the Englishman is cold and heartless, even when he loves; but I begin to think that is not true. The Fräulein is asleep, yes? Then you must go quietly in with your beautiful flowers, so that when she awakes she will find them beside her. What a happy surprise for her!"

Michael would have liked to have made an immensely dignified and crushing reply to this speech, but unfortunately he was so much annoyed that he merely blushed and blustered.

"Look here!" he said indignantly. "All this

nonsense about Englishmen in love—it's gone quite far enough. Things have come to a pretty pass if a man can't go out and buy a Canterbury bell without being told he's the one hot-blooded Englishman this side of the Alps! I wouldn't have bought those beastly gentians if you hadn't bounced me into it; and I haven't bought these flowers for Miss Garland at all, but for one of my other friends who are arriving this afternoon —and I should like a vase, please."

Frau Hofer had not understood much of this tirade, but she did grasp the essential fact that Michael intended this floral tribute for one of the new arrivals. It was a bigger and more impressive bouquet than the four-penn'orth of gentians which he had presented to Helen, and from this sign she inferred that the new love occupied a larger place than Helen in his obviously expansive affections. Michael rose very considerably in Frau Hofer's estimation. She eyed him with positive deference, and yet managed to infuse into her admiring glance the monstrous leer which he already knew and dreaded.

"*So!* These nice flowers are for the lady who comes, yes? You put them in her room now, so that when she arrives she sees at once that you have been waiting for her and thinking of her? That is right, Herr Park. It is a good plan. I shall send Rosa upstairs at once with the vase for them."

Very red about the ears, and feeling like the Grand Turk, Michael stalked upstairs, followed by Rosa, tripping demurely behind him. On the top landing was a table, and when he reached it, Rosa was at his elbow

with a vase in each hand. They were very small vases, and neither would contain more than half of his herbaceous bouquet. Rosa, who was taking more interest in the arrangement of the flowers than Michael thought either necessary or desirable, suggested, by means of a flood of German and a wealth of gesture, that the bouquet should be divided into two halves and thus accommodated in the vases. Michael assented, feeling that the matter of floral decoration was passing out of his hands; and he hoped sincerely that, as far as Rosa was concerned, it remained a matter of decoration, and had not the symbolic significance which it had for her employer. He was soon disillusioned. When Rosa had arranged the two vases of flowers to her own satisfaction, she carried one of them into the room intended for Delia, beckoning to Michael to follow and approve while she placed it carefully on the bedside table. Since there was nothing else in the room upon which to stand it, Michael nodded his approval of the arrangement for which there was no alternative, tweaked one of the sunflowers to indicate his interest, and returned to the landing for the other vase, which, he supposed, would have to stand on the washhand-stand or the floor. Rosa, however, forestalled him. Seizing the other vase of flowers, she advanced with it towards the room which Michael had indicated as designed for the other female member of the party. Michael intercepted her quickly, resenting the notion that he should provide Canterbury bells and sunflowers at great cost for a girl like Joanna Nichols, who would almost certainly consider a mixed vermouth more acceptable as a greeting.

He barred the way to Joanna's doorway and said, "*Nicht!*" very firmly.

Rosa's face, which had been serious, and even troubled, throughout the arrangement and disposal of the flowers, suddenly assumed its normal expression of alert benevolence. Indeed, the girl positively beamed. She whisked the vase from under Michael's nose, bore it triumphantly along the passage, and stopped outside Helen's door, where she stood with her ear pressed to one of the panels. After an instant or two she turned to Michael, who had followed her, and said, in a gusty whisper, "*Das Fräulein schläf!*" She set down the vase on the floor beside the door, explaining to Michael as best she could that he must wait and present his offering of flowers as soon as Helen was awake. When she had disappeared down the stairs, Michael picked them up, took them back to Delia's room, and placed them on the floor in the middle of the room.

"That'll show her," he thought, "that they're *my* flowers, and not merely a bunch of oddments out of the hotel garden." He then realized that he had adopted automatically Frau Hofer's view of the value of floral tributes, and, feeling thoroughly disgusted, he decided to go out and have some beer, which he had come to regard as the best means of restoring his normal self-confidence if for any reason it was disturbed.

On the doorstep he met Mr. Wiggins, who urged him to go bathing in the Wallersee. When Michael refused, Mr. Wiggins became very urgent and incoherent, and Michael remembered Helen's theory that he felt diffident about taking Miss Talbot to bathe unless

he had other friends to countenance the proceeding.

"What you need," said Michael, feeling so paternal towards his former music-master that he no longer saw any sense in addressing him as "Sir," "is a bit more confidence and a bit less conventionality. Off you go to her hotel and fetch her—and take her some flowers. She'll be a deal more pleased to see you alone than she would be to see the whole party of us—you can take that from me. Don't forget the flowers."

"Flowers?" repeated Mr. Wiggins, in bewildered tones.

"Canterbury bells. You get them in the market." Michael noticed Frau Hofer behind him in the hall, and he shouted after the departing Mr. Wiggins, "*Les fleurs sont les passeports internationaux d'amour.*"

He knew that Mr. Wiggins did not understand French, and he hoped that Frau Hofer did.

CHAPTER X

MICHAEL, mellowed by beer, had returned to the Goldene Esel and was standing on the steps when he saw the Talbot turn into the Getreide-gasse, followed by the Alvis. From the Talbot descended Rupert, wearing a tussore suit of uncommon elegance; and Delia, looking like a nymph in pale green draperies. Michael, as he went to meet them, lost a little of his confidence in the overwhelming charm of Tyrolean dress and felt self-conscious about his sunburnt knees. Then he saw David and Joanna scrambling out of the Alvis, and noticed that David looked decidedly crumpled and dusty, and that Joanna, although as jaunty as ever, was dishevelled, and some of his self-confidence was restored. Delia greeted him with a cry of pleasure.

"Michael, what a lovely uniform! Are you being a Strauss militiaman, or the playboy of Central Europe?"

"I'm being myself," replied Michael, "for the first time in my life. It's a grand feeling. I do hope you'll like this hotel, Delia. It's a bit primitive, I'm afraid. I've only taken your rooms provisionally, so you can leave to-morrow if you hate it. The trouble is, the town's so full."

"I don't suppose it will be too primitive for me, if it's all right for you and the others," said Delia, with an ineffectual attempt to look hardy. "I'm such an old campaigner. My luggage is simply stuffed with eiderdowns and enormous sponges and reading-matter and pillows and things like that. I can be comfortable anywhere."

"All *I* want," said Joanna, frisking on the pavement and dropping a knitting-needle and a couple of bull's-eyes, "is a hot bath and a cold drink."

Helen, who had joined the party, turned to her and said seriously: "But, Joanna, those are just the things that this hotel is not very good at—hot water and ice. I do hope you won't mind."

Michael, helping Rupert with the luggage, glared at her over the top of what Delia called "my little brown case" and what everyone else called a fair-sized trunk. "That girl's tactlessness," he thought bitterly, "would make a party of saints dissatisfied with Paradise." He noticed that David was muttering something at his elbow.

"Neither bathroom nor refrigerator, I suppose?" David was saying, with a kind of lugubrious triumph. "Pity I didn't come on ahead and see about an hotel myself—for Delia, at any rate. One can't be in two places at once, unfortunately."

"I beg you pardon?" said Michael politely.

"I was only saying that Delia won't really enjoy having cold baths and warm drinks," David replied, modifying his morose tone slightly. "However, if it's only for one night I dare say I shall be able to find

other rooms for to-morrow. I'll just have a wash and then I'll go and scout round the town."

Michael smiled happily to himself at the thought of David scouting round the reception-bureaux of the various luxury hotels, which were already so full that emergency beds were being placed behind screens in corridors. David might consider himself specially fitted for the task of ensuring Delia's comfort, but even he could not conjure up suites of rooms replete with *confort moderne* in a town which had reached the point of seasonal prosperity at which it could turn its hotel corridors to profit. "They'll be glad of my Golden Ass in the end," he thought, "even in spite of the absence of baths and the presence of Frau Hofer."

Delia, who had been greeted with voluble eagerness by Frau Hofer and had been taken upstairs to see the rooms, now rejoined the party on the steps. She drifted happily towards Michael.

"I love this hotel," she said. "Not, perhaps, as an abiding city . . . but as a stepping-stone to higher things it's perfection."

"If you're thinking of much higher things, you'd better insist on a lift," remarked Joanna, who was tired and had resented the stairs.

"My room," continued Delia, addressing Michael, but acknowledging with a gesture what she had learned to recognize as a specimen of Joanna's wit, "is like a cell in some enchanting convent—all bare, and sunny, and whitewashed. I shall feel like a nun in it—and that's a thing I've always wanted to feel, from time to time, you know, without actually being one. And

the proprietress tells me, Michael, that those lovely flowers were put there by you."

"They were all I could get in the market——" Michael began deprecatingly, when he became aware that Helen, at his elbow, was gazing at him more soulfully than he would have believed possible in so practical a girl, and murmuring:

"Thank you for my bunch, too, Michael—*dear*."

Michael realized with a flash of intuition that the incurably romantic Rosa had removed the second vase of flowers from the floor of Delia's room and had presented them to Helen, doubtless with a wealth of descriptive gesture which indicated all too clearly that they were a token of Herr Park's devotion. To his extreme annoyance, Michael found himself blushing hotly. Nobody seemed to notice this except Helen, who patted his arm with an affectionate and faintly proprietary gesture, and said:

"I'm going to stay with Joanna while she unpacks and changes, Michael. Why don't you take Delia and show her something of the town?"

Michael had never been so sorely tempted to box anyone's ears as he was to box Helen's at this moment.

Delia, happily unaware of the conflict of feelings which was going on over her head—Helen's earnest, tender emotion at understanding Michael, and Michael's speechless indignation at being misunderstood by Helen—said gaily:

"Yes, do, Michael—and show me first of all a café where I can sit and drink iced coffee and watch people wearing lovely comic hats like yours."

Rupert and David had taken their cars to a garage. Michael, maddened by the knowledge that Helen was yearning benevolently at his elbow and congratulating herself on her nobleness in sending him off with Delia, said shortly, "Right!" and shepherded Delia along the Getreide-gasse without further ado. Delia's exclamations of delight at everything she saw made their progress to the Alter Markt a slow one, and when at last they were seated under the trellis at Tomaselli's and drinking iced coffee, his irritation with Helen had worn off and he was able to enjoy to the full the pleasure of sitting opposite to Delia and answering her questions. To be able to sit and look at anyone as lovely as Delia was privilege enough, he felt, but to have her to himself while she received her first impressions of this town which he liked so much, and to watch her first reactions to the cosmopolitan crowd dressed as Tyrolean peasants, and listen to her delighted comments—this was a joy which he would not have forgone for all the gold in Arabia. Her incredulity on hearing that the wearers of national dress were not all Austrians delighted him.

"All these women in aprons and flat straw hats," he explained, feeling very cosmopolitan, "they're not Austrians, any of them. They're English hoydens, and French *poules*, and German matrons, and American debs. You see that blonde beauty getting out of that big touring car?—the one in the very fetching spotted dress with the black laced bodice?—she's probably the daughter of a Czecho-Slovakian banker——"

"On the contrary," said Delia, interrupting him, "she's the daughter of Lord Mallow, who's less like a Czecho-Slovakian banker than you'd believe possible." She raised her voice slightly. "Venetia, my sweet! Just look this way! That's better—now come and tell me all about your hat."

Michael found himself being introduced to Lady Venetia Strange, whom he recognized, from the many photographs of her which he had seen in the illustrated weeklies, as the wife of the youngest and best-advertised member of the Government. He remembered, too, that when he had been at Oxford, Venetia Clover, then unmarried, had been a sort of decorative emblem for whom the brightest spirits competed to grace their Commemoration parties. Michael was duly impressed. Venetia, despite the fact that she was dressed like a peasant in the chorus of an operetta, contrived to look like a goddess. Michael, seated between her and Delia, was completely dazzled. He gazed from one to the other. If Delia were a Botticelli angel, then Venetia was Helen of Troy and Bianca Capello and Lorelei and all the legendary golden beauties of the world. Michael, ordering more iced coffee, and offering cigarettes to his two companions, wished with all his heart that every single friend and enemy whom he had ever had could walk past the Café Tomaselli at that moment, all of them in single file in an endless procession, and see and envy him.

"I suppose," Venetia was saying to Delia, "that by no miraculous chance are you in need of a house?"

"Not actually," Delia replied, "because we've got one—if you can call it a house. The doll's-house in Bourdon Street."

"Not in London, dearest idiot—I mean here, in Salzburg."

"Well, no, we don't, exactly; but we do rather need an hotel."

"You can't have an hotel, darling. They're all entirely full of the people who have come to listen to music and the other people who have come to watch them listening to music."

"Ours isn't. It's a lovely hotel, with airy white-washed cells, just like a convent. Only no bath."

"But how exactly like a convent! You can't possibly stay there, Delia. You'd better come and have some of my house. I took it because I thought Andrew Mear and the Doom-Yates were coming; and now Andrew has been arrested in Germany for refusing to buy a newspaper or something—he kept saying he was a poet and not a politician, and he said it in French, anyway, so they put him into prison to think it over—and Nigel and Myrtle have suddenly gone mad and gone to America, and here I am with this large house and nobody in it except me and the Heir."

"Whose heir, darling?"

"Mine—and Mervyn's, of course. You know—that baby I had in the spring. He's far less repulsive now, and doesn't make nearly so much noise. I'm getting quite used to him. You've no idea how well I got to know him on the way here. I brought him and his nurse out here in the Bentley, and the damn

fool of a nurse got car-sick, so I jettisoned her at Trier and left her to go on by train." Venetia, feeling that Michael had not been included sufficiently in the conversation, turned to him and added confidentially: "You'd hardly believe how inconvenient a baby is when you're trying to make a good day's run over indifferent roads. The Bentley has bucket seats in front, and at anything over sixty I thought the Heir would bounce out. Finally I put him on the back seat by himself, and put the tonneau-cover on, and bored some holes in it so that he could breathe, and that plan worked far better. The only difficulty was that I forgot to declare him at the frontier, and the German Customs people made a hellish fuss when they found him, and insinuated he was a German baby and that I was smuggling him out of the country. I don't know which of us was the more furious. But I won."

Michael was so much astonished by Venetia's view of her maternal responsibilities that he could find nothing to say except: "Wasn't he suffocated?"

"Of course he wasn't," Venetia replied indignantly. "Do you suppose that I should be sitting here calmly telling this story against the Heir if I had happened to suffocate him? He could breathe perfectly well. The holes in the tonneau-cover were quite large. I made them with a pair of pliers."

Michael felt crushed and was silent.

Delia said: "How much of this house of yours is there to spare, Venetia?"

"Oh, several bedrooms and some charming little Venetian salons, all pink silk and rather dusty. You'd

better all come and share it with me. How many of you are there? Is Rupert here?"

"Rupert's here, and Helen Garland, whom you probably don't know, and Joanna Nichols, whom you probably do."

"I've seen her about. Wears queer hats. *I* know. That's five, counting him." Venetia indicated Michael with a piece of *pretzl*. "And David, I suppose. Is that all?"

"Yes, six of us. Can you house so many?"

"Oh, I expect so, if some of you sleep on ormolu sofas in the salons. It's a funny party, Delia. How did you come?"

"Michael and Helen came first by train, and the rest of us came in our Talbot and David's Alvis. We've just arrived."

"And you," said Venetia, turning to Michael, "have been here at least a week, I suppose. It takes people about a week to get to the stage of wearing these clothes as if they'd worn them all their lives. I hope you aren't a music critic?"

"No," said Michael. "I like Wagner."

"Speaking for myself," said Venetia, "I'm tone-deaf, but I do enjoy going to the opera here, because the unearthly discomfort of the whole thing reminds me so much of the worst and best Bloomsbury parties I used to go to before I married Mervyn and started going to the good. The hard seats and the incredible lack of ventilation, and the people in tails and tiaras and tweeds and djibbahs, and drinking Benedictine and eating sausages in the intervals—it's all like a breath

from the slums, and just the thing to take the taste of Covent Garden from one's mouth. People who like that sort of thing tell me that the music's good, too."

At this point Rupert arrived, with Helen and Joanna. Delia explained to them Venetia's suggestion that they should all share her house. It was received cordially by Rupert and Joanna, who had now explored to the full the resources of the Goldene Esel; and with reservation by Michael and Helen, who felt, in spite of themselves, something of a pioneer's pride in their discovery of that hotel, for all its disadvantages.

"The joke is," said Joanna, "that David is combing the town for suites of rooms with running water and private bathrooms and iced drinks and goodness knows what glory."

"And the tragedy is that, being David, he'll probably find them," commented Delia, "now that it's too late."

Rupert smiled. "Isn't that so often the tragedy of purposeful people?" he said. "They achieve something by dint of immense efficiency, and then find that they have been forestalled by accident."

"Rupert," said Venetia, turning upon him instantly, "don't dare to infer that I have invited you all by sheer accident to live in my house. This Michael has already insinuated that I accidentally suffocated my Heir in the Bentley on the way here. I wish you'd all get it into your heads that I'm as capable of making up my own mind as anyone else is."

Michael, hearing this remark, believed that Venetia had said, "I'm as capable of making up my own mind

as anyone else's." He thought it likely that Venetia, with the irresistible combination of her outrageous beauty and her effrontery, was in the habit of making up for them the minds of many people. "Almost anyone," he reflected, "would give in and go quietly if she really meant them to. I would myself. Such is the power of the human eye—particularly if it happens to be dark blue and about as large as a good-sized cornflower—and more particularly if it happens to belong to that very remarkable face." He felt unaccountably pleased that she had referred to him as "this Michael," although he knew well enough that she had only done so because she had forgotten, if she had ever heard, his surname. He said:

"Will there be a corner for me in this house of yours, by any chance?"

"A chink," said Venetia, with that air of decisiveness which she always displayed towards the young men she proposed to adopt, in order to indicate to them that the conditions of their adoption implied no more than enrolment in her entourage. "You'll probably have to sleep on a baroque chaise-longue on the landing. It's more *chaise* than *longue,* actually, and the baroque parts may be a bit painful—but with plenty of *duvets* and some aspirin I expect you'll be all right."

"Thank you," said Michael meekly.

Helen caught sight of Miss Talbot and Mr. Wiggins returning from their bathe. Miss Talbot, looking very tailor-made in linen, was wearing a somewhat incongruous little bunch of wilting roses which made Michael smile. Evidently Mr. Wiggins had taken his advice.

Mr. Wiggins was in such good spirits that even the ordeal of being introduced to four strangers did not deter him. Miss Talbot, whose looks were greatly improved by a becoming degree of sunburn and the now patent adulation of Mr. Wiggins, was positively affable. Helen made the introductions. When she reached Rupert, Miss Talbot became even more cordial, and said:

"I can't help thinking that I know your mother."

"It's my belief," thought Michael, "that she can't help thinking that whenever she meets anyone. It's a mania for considering herself a sort of universal aunt —probably due to some spinster repression or other. The woman wants psycho-analysing."

"If your mother has a flat in Knightsbridge and is interested in prison reform, then I used to know her quite well," continued Miss Talbot, addressing Rupert.

Rupert nodded. "At the moment, my mother has a villa at Cap Martin and is interested in the Russian Ballet. But I've no doubt that you knew her in an earlier phase. She changes her houses and her enthusiasms remarkably often—which is one of the reasons why so many people know her. But the prison reform was an early interest—pre-Suffragette, I think. I shouldn't have thought you'd have been old enough . . ."

Miss Talbot was about to protest, when she became aware of Mr. Wiggins's ardent gaze. She coughed deprecatingly, and murmured, "Well, perhaps scarcely. . . ."

Michael noticed this small comedy with approval.

As he sat luxuriating in the combined radiance of Delia and Venetia, he was glad to think that the more rusty and repressed emotions of Miss Talbot and Mr. Wiggins were also being aroused by the atmosphere of irresponsibility which pervaded the town. He looked up and observed David Herald, wearing a triumphant expression, threading his way between the tables.

"David, my sweet!" Venetia cried, tilting back her chair and extending a welcoming arm.

"Hullo, V—beautiful as ever, I see," said David disapprovingly. He took a chair by Delia, and added, in tones of energetic self-satisfaction, "I've fixed everything. The plans are all cut and dried."

"Good," said Joanna, before anyone else could speak, "because we're going to make hay with them."

David groaned and looked apprehensively round the party, already suspecting that his labours had been in vain. Delia explained, very sweetly and gently:

"You see, darling, Venetia has a lovely house, with bathrooms and baroque sofas and all sorts of luxuries, and she says we can all share it. It's dreadfully sad to think that we didn't know before you started to look for hotels—but nice to think how cosy we shall all be in V's noble villa. Now, what would you like to drink?"

"Whisky," said David, with considerable bitterness. "Then I'd better go back, I suppose, and cancel the rooms I'd booked."

"I must go and change," said Michael, "or I'll be late for *Tristan*. The damn thing begins at six."

"Do you really sit through *all* of it?" Venetia asked,

with surprise. "I call that remarkably thorough. I always go in at about half-time, having had as much dinner as possible first, and even then there are several hours to go. But, as I told you, I'm tone-deaf. I generally confuse *Tristan* with *The Merry Widow*, because of all that larking about on the staircase. However, if it's an emotional treat to you, you're right to get as much of it as you can, I suppose. I'm sorry you've got to go and change; and I'm sorry, David, that you're hurrying off to fuss about something again. The rest of you had better come and have cocktails and see my house."

Miss Talbot, who had been waiting for some minutes for a chance to tell Venetia that she had once met her mother at an agricultural show, stiffened slightly and excused herself, on the grounds that she never drank cocktails. Mr. Wiggins, also, looked uneasy and began to edge himself backwards out of the group.

Venetia, however, was not in the habit of allowing anyone to evade the full rigours of her hospitality when she was in the mood for entertaining. She said briefly to Miss Talbot: "It's all right—there's sherry." She then rose, towering over the diminutive Mr. Wiggins from the willowy height of her five feet ten inches, fixed him with her compelling blue gaze, and said: "You'll come in the front of the Bentley with me. Anyone who can't fit in the back can follow in a taxi."

Mr. Wiggins, like an agitated rabbit, scuttled after her to the car, casting an imploring glance at Miss Talbot as he did so. Miss Talbot decided to join the party, partly in order to protect the obviously defence-

less Mr. Wiggins, partly in order to get another opportunity to make her point about having known Venetia's mother, and followed him. All of them managed to get into the Bentley except Helen, who had disappeared with David.

Helen felt that David had been hardly used. She despised David for what she called dancing attendance on Delia, but she was inclined to blame Delia for allowing, and, indeed, encouraging him to do so. Helen felt strongly that no woman should be so lacking in independence as to enlist masculine help except for such purposes as lifting enormous weights, setting about large and ill-disposed burglars, swinging the starting-handles of cold and intractable motor-cars, and similar tasks which could fairly be described as "man's work" and were obviously without the scope of feminine strength and skill. To expect, or even to permit, a man to perform trivial services such as fetching and carrying coats, making arrangements about hotel accommodation, and providing cushions and rugs and cigarettes, seemed to her to be positively degrading. She had listened, with secret disapproval, to Joanna's riotous description of the scene at Bourdon Street when David packed Delia's hats while Rupert watched and Delia was enjoying her leisurely bath. She thought that this story reflected little credit on any of them; and Delia, in particular, had sunk considerably in her estimation. Packing, she considered, was pre-eminently woman's work. A woman should pack not only her own clothes, but her husband's also. To allow an infatuated man to pack one's hat-box was unfair, frivolous, and

altogether futile. It was not surprising that David, having reached such depths of abject servility, should find himself being made use of as an honorary courier and getting no credit for his pains. Helen had decided that a certain amount of time spent in rousing David to a realization of his ignoble bondage would not be wasted. Somewhere at the back of this plan was a half-formulated notion that the spectacle of her temporary concentration upon David's needs might provoke Michael into abandoning the heroic silence which he maintained with regard to his feelings towards her.

CHAPTER XI

The house which Venetia Strange had taken for the Festival Season was a fair-sized modern villa on the north bank of the river. The interior was lavishly decorated in the Viennese style, and not a room was lacking in a profusion of gilding, blue or pink satin upholstery, and draperies and hangings richly frilled or fringed. She entertained her friends in a salon in which the magnificence of brown marble was augmented by the splendours of azure brocade and the grandeur of gilt. The ceiling was embellished with a riot of cupids and fountains and roses, done in doubtful perspective but with a fine feeling for frivolity and movement. Gold cupids on the walls supported flambeaux for the electric light. The carpet was wonderfully floral, and the many mirrors in curly gold frames redoubled every aspect of the general elegance in a way that was positively confusing.

In the midst of this magnificence stood a large console table, on which were arranged bottles and glasses, a cocktail-shaker and a bowl of ice. Venetia, in her peasant costume of flowered cotton and her beehive straw hat, proceeded to mix cocktails in a business-like fashion, without any notion of the incongruity of her appearance, her occupation, and her surroundings.

Her guests disposed themselves round the room, finding little encouragement to relaxation in the tightly upholstered chairs and sofas with their bullet-hard little cushions of blue satin. Miss Talbot, in particular, looked wildly irrelevant, sitting perfectly upright in her tailor-made stiffness on a spindle-legged gilt chair in the window. The party was augmented by a young man who arrived unexpectedly, announcing simply that he was thirsty, and was introduced as Nicki von Schwarzach. Venetia immediately handed over to him the preparation of the cocktails, remarking:

"Wouldn't Alice give you a drink, then?"

"She said I was to meet her here," replied Nicki, who spoke perfect English in a permanently peevish tone. He wore a refined version of peasant costume, but mitigated its plainness by the addition of a bracelet and a handsome emerald ring. Holding the cocktail-shaker at arm's length, lest he should endanger the new-laundered perfection of his attire, he shook it languidly, and added: "Alice has been a little trying to-day—really too *exigeante*. She wanted me to go with her to some terrible Haydn concert. Imagine—in this heat! But I said I'd be here if she came between six and seven."

"If Alice is coming here after a Haydn concert at the Mozarteum, you'd better refill that shaker," said Venetia.

Nicki von Schwarzach, obediently attending to his duties, allowed his gaze to wander round the room and its occupants. He passed quickly over Mr. Wiggins, whom he considered inelegant and unattrac-

tive. Rupert impressed him with his superb good looks, but he decided that nothing was to be gained from pursuing the acquaintance of anyone so typically English and self-contained. Delia, he thought, would make a perfect confidante—that rare type of young married woman who has infinite charm and no tendency to assertiveness. Watching Delia as she listened gracefully on a sofa to some narrative of Venetia's, he pigeon-holed her mentally as a recipient for his confidences on some future occasion. The next time his soul was oppressed he would tell Delia about the exigencies of Alice, and Delia would look grave and sympathetic, and make beautiful movements with her hands. He passed over Joanna even more quickly than he had passed over Mr. Wiggins, because sprightly young women who giggled and looked jaunty filled him with horror and alarm. Finally his gaze rested on Miss Talbot, still sitting with a ramrod back on her gilt chair, and sipping a glass of sherry. Miss Talbot, looking surprisingly handsome with the evening sun behind her, returned his gaze steadily. She could not, in fact, take her eyes off him. Young men with attenuated figures and curling hair, who wore shorts and jewellery, and sidled about with cocktail-shakers talking excellent English in spite of a foreign title, were a phenomenon which Miss Talbot had not hitherto encountered. She felt that Nicki von Schwarzach was something out of a bad dream, and he fascinated her as people are fascinated by some grotesque object in a nightmare.

Nicki, observing Miss Talbot's eyes fixed on him,

began to take an interest in her. He took an interest in almost all women over forty, if they appeared to be rich. He noticed that her clothes, although in his opinion ridiculous, were obviously expensive. He decided that her age was about forty-five. Glass in hand, he drifted across the room and folded himself up delicately on a pseudo-baroque stool beside her. Putting back the hair from his forehead with a weary hand on which the emerald gleamed, he said:

"I suppose you know Alice Birkendorf-Speed?"

"No," replied Miss Talbot uncompromisingly. "Why should I?"

Nicki considered this. "I don't know, really, why you should. Probably you wouldn't like her. Many people don't, you know. Of course, she's a *dear*, in her way—but terribly *difficile* at times. So *inconsiderate*. That's why I think you wouldn't like her. I think it's *terrible* for people to be so inconsiderate, don't you?"

"You mean making a rendezvous in someone else's house?" said Miss Talbot coldly.

"Not exactly *that*." Nicki had a feeling that he was not getting on as well with Miss Talbot as he had hoped. "Though it would have been *nicer* if she had promised to give me a drink somewhere else. Venetia might have been out—and then what should I have done?"

"You'd have been obliged to buy one for yourself, I suppose—or go thirsty."

Nicki looked extremely offended. He tried quite hard to achieve an air of wounded dignity, with the

result that he merely achieved a pout, and said fretfully:

"I always notice that you English simply *can't* realize that everyone is not as wealthy as you are. When one has *no* money—but really not a *Pfennig*—not two Groschen—one learns the kindness of one's friends."

"Have you many friends?" asked Miss Talbot, fixing him with her penetrating stare.

Nicki saw nothing derogatory in this question. He simpered, and replied: "Oh, a few, you know. But they all seem to be leaving Salzburg, and I don't know *what* to do. Alice, for instance, insists on going to Germany next week. She doesn't think of me at all. Of course, I can't go there. It's *terribly* thoughtless of her."

"Why can't you?" demanded Miss Talbot, brightening visibly at the thought of Nicki von Schwarzach in a concentration camp.

Nicki shuddered. "That frightful National Socialism—all that barbarity! It makes me quite *ill* to think of it. Oh, but here *is* dear Alice. She looks so hot, doesn't she? I told her that concert would be *agony*. She only went because the tickets were so expensive. I must ask her what it was like—forgive me. . . ."

He left Miss Talbot's side, much to her relief, and undulated across the room towards a woman who had just come in.

The Baroness Birkendorf-Speed was a middle-aged American woman who prided herself on knowing what she wanted, and getting it. She achieved her ends,

partly by means of her unlimited wealth; partly through her inordinate disregard of laws, conventions, customs, prejudices, codes of behaviour and public opinion; and chiefly through her undefeatable good humour. In this way she had acquired several husbands, innumerable lovers, vast additions to her huge fortune, a startling reputation, and a castle in Scotland, a *Schloss* in Germany, a palace in Venice, and various villas dotted about in the more eligible pleasure resorts of Europe and America. She had assumed, through matrimony, so many different nationalities, that she was now a hard-shell cosmopolitan. She retained nothing of her American origin except her accent, a certain financial shrewdness, and an exact knowledge of the degree of graft necessary to enable her to flout the laws and regulations of her native land with the impunity with which she flouted those of less vigilant and less exacting countries. In appearance she was short, dark, and agile, with a face that is best described in Gilbert's words as being "far less like a hatchet than a dissipated saw." She had been married five or six times, in turn divorcing, or having been divorced by, her French, Italian, German, Russian and Scottish husbands. Of all her husbands, only the first, an American called Speed, had had the decency to die before there was any question of filing a petition. Out of gratitude to that benevolent old man—he had been a venerable fool, and had left her millions of dollars which she had thoughtfully invested in European securities with an eye to the future—she had retained his name throughout her subsequent matri-

monial career, using it as a suffix to the surname or title of the current husband, with the subconscious feeling that it was the one stable name which she would ever possess.

Alice Birkendorf-Speed wore peasant costume, but, like her protégé, Nicki von Schwarzach, she augmented it with jewels. The feather was clasped to her hat with a vast solitaire diamond, and several rows of immense pearls reached to the waist of her demure cotton dress. She darted forward with the birdlike eagerness of movement which characterizes a certain type of American woman whose nervous energy is entirely destructive of all tranquillity, flashed round the room a glance which conveyed a greeting to Venetia, a recognition of Rupert, and a peremptory message to Nicki, and made a dash for the central table and the cocktail-shaker, as inevitably as a piece of metal is jerked towards a magnet.

"Will anyone tell me," she demanded of the company in general, "why all concerts, except in England and the States, are held in sealed compartments? I guess people want to breathe while they listen—but do they get the chance? They do not. They just suffocate. I'm quite mortified at having such a thirst, Venetia—but I'm glad to see there's more where that came from."

Having emptied the shaker and swallowed its contents with astonishing rapidity, she looked hopefully at the array of bottles on the table. Nicki, hovering obediently at her elbow, hastened to make a new mixture, without even looking to Venetia for approval.

Venetia did not appear to mind. She made some vague introductions, and then said to the Baroness:

"I've got a house-party, Alice. Let's celebrate it to-morrow with a picnic. We'll go and bathe in the Wallersee. You bring your car, and Nicki, and anyone else you've got."

"I haven't got anyone worth mentioning at the Villa just now," replied Alice, settling herself with her third cocktail on a sofa and making rapid gestures to Nicki to show that she needed an ash-tray. "I've got a bunch of dud Americans eating their heads off at my expense, and a phony Pole I picked up in Capri, but he's fallen for one of the Boston duds, and does nothing but drift around after her as if he was a sick cat, so I guess we'll leave him back home with the rest. I'll bring Nicki, if you like. He can mix the drinks. He won't bathe, though—he doesn't like getting wet. Says it's bad for his hair—don't you, honey?"

"Alice, you're *terrible*," protested the wretched Nicki, torn between the desire to slap the face of his protectress, and the desire to placate her in the hope that she would give him champagne for dinner. "As if you didn't *know* it was doctor's orders. . . ."

"I guess it wasn't doctor's orders that made you yell like a baby with the colic the day you fell out of the boat into two feet of water at Como," replied Alice unkindly. Turning to Venetia she added: "Talking of yelling babies, I heard that child of yours roaring like a steam whistle as I came in."

Venetia looked interested. "The Heir giving tongue, was he? It's all that nurse's fault—she will

sing to him. Hymns, too. The woman's crazy. No wonder he screams. Imagine trying to go to sleep while a woman with a face like a cheerful cow croons 'All things bright and beautiful' in a nasal undertone about a yard from your face! I'd better go and rescue him. I'll bring him down here—it'll be a nice change. We'll soon cheer him up."

Venetia left the room and soon reappeared carrying a solemn baby who surveyed the company with aloof disapproval and then gave Venetia a well-directed blow in the eye with its fist.

"Savage creatures, children," said Venetia. "Thank God he can't bite yet—he hasn't any teeth. Here, Alice, you have him." She planted the child on Alice's knee.

Alice accepted him without comment, as though he were a parcel she had been asked to hold. She put him face downwards, rested her elbows in the small of his back while she smoked and drank her cocktail, and continued her conversation with Rupert.

Mr. Wiggins, who had a nervous horror of babies which was only exceeded by his horror of American women and gigolos, now decided that he could endure the party no longer, and rose to take his leave. He could not imagine why he had come, except that Venetia had compelled him to do so; and he hoped sincerely that her anti-Separationist mania was now gratified, and that she would allow him to depart without protest, so that he could escort Miss Talbot safely away from this bedlamic party. Miss Talbot had already stalked across the room and was informing

Venetia rather curtly that she had met her mother at a horticultural show. Miss Talbot was as anxious as Mr. Wiggins was to escape, but she was determined to unburden herself of her little reminiscence before doing so. Unfortunately she was so much astonished and bewildered by the behaviour and conversation of her fellow guests that she forgot all the finer points in the story, particularly the amusing bit about the Scotch gardener and the begonias. Venetia, however, responded very heartily.

"Excellent!" she said, rescuing the baby just as Alice Birkendorf-Speed had upset the ash-tray over its head. "Don't go. Have some sherry. You must come to all my parties. Ma would be furious if she thought I'd discovered an old horticultural crony and failed to cherish her. Come to the picnic to-morrow." She brushed the ashes vigorously from the Heir as she spoke, and extracted a cigarette stub or two from his hair.

"Surely," said Miss Talbot, with all the eagerness of the spinster pioneer of women's movements to dogmatize on the subject of infant welfare, "that child ought to be in bed. It seems to me a great mistake to have taken him up and brought him downstairs to this party."

Venetia surveyed her guests thoughtfully. "Well, it's not much of a party, certainly. But, bad as it is, I bet you the Heir would rather be here than upstairs with that woman singing hymns over his cradle. Just hang on to him a minute while I give Alice another drink."

She thrust the Heir into Miss Talbot's reluctant arms. Miss Talbot, holding him cautiously at some little distance from herself, surveyed him critically. Her knowledge of infants was drawn solely from her periodical inspections of a model day-nursery where hygiene and spiritual harmony were the two prevailing principles. She thought that the Heir looked gross.

"Isn't he rather fat?" she said.

Venetia nodded. "Yes, I have him kept at rather a substantial weight—I think it's more becoming, at that age. There's plenty of time for him to get lean and bronzed when he's a little older. Chuck him over to Rupert if you're sick of him."

Miss Talbot, thankful to part with the Heir, whose unwinking scrutiny she found almost embarrassing, made her excuses and left with Mr. Wiggins. Rupert, disposing of the baby very neatly in an armchair and wedging him in with cushions, remarked to Venetia:

"Somehow, I connect you with elk-hounds rather than with infants, V."

Venetia nodded. "I know. As a thing to have about the house, I much prefer the dog. He's more intelligent—and besides, I've had him longer. But dogs are tiresome when one is travelling, and I had to bring something, so I brought the Heir. At least one doesn't have to leave children in quarantine for six months when one gets home."

"Venetia," said Nicki plaintively, "Alice is accusing me of fawning on that very severe woman who has just left. It's *too* unkind. One might as well fawn on a

fir tree. I didn't even *like* her. But one must exert oneself at a party. I did my best."

"When I arrived, you were sitting looking at her with a face like a begging letter," said Alice. "Who is she, anyway?"

"I don't know, but she seems to have known my mother," Venetia answered, giving the Heir her pearl necklace to suck, because he seemed bored.

"And mine," Rupert added.

"She has been adopted by Helen Garland because she was at Cambridge with *her* mother," Joanna volunteered.

"Queer," commented Alice. "It sounds a funny hobby, to me. I reckon she can't have known my mother, or she'd have died of shock and wouldn't be here to tell us. My mother kept a saloon in Los Angeles, and a darn good saloon it was, but I guess Nicki's new girl-friend wouldn't go much on that kind of joint."

Nicki shuddered. He always shuddered when Alice was more than usually downright; but he tried to make his disgust patent to the onlookers while concealing it from Alice, who was capable of giving him a friendly cuff and telling him not to be dumb. Nicki was extremely proud of a complicated family tree which proved his descent from many of the most ancient and cretinous families in the Danube basin, and he felt bitterly ashamed of his connexion with Alice, whenever she mentioned the saloon in Los Angeles. It may be added that when the saloon was safely in the back-ground he was not ashamed of his position at all. It

was not his own pecuniary dependence, but Alice's social independence, which wounded his dignity.

Venetia and Delia went to make a tour of the house, and returned with the information that it would be impossible to accommodate more than four extra persons.

"Let's leave Helen and Michael at their Golden Ass, then," Joanna suggested. She had enjoyed her motoring party so well that she had no wish to be separated from any of its members. Adoring Rupert, and plaguing David, and laughing at and with Delia, provided her with all the amusement she could wish, and Helen and Michael had seemed a little humdrum when contrasted with her new friends. She had observed that both of them appeared to be less priggish, in their several ways, after ten days in Salzburg—Helen had more powder on her nose and less arrogance in her manner, while Michael's conversation now ran on food, drink and clothing rather than on his interminable theories about matters which she considered tedious. Joanna had noticed these improvements with satisfaction. She looked forward to some cosy chats with Helen, and some romantic rambles with Michael: but she was very willing indeed that they should remain in their comic but comfortless hotel while she and David and the Temple-Cheynes migrated to the superior surroundings of the Villa Mitzi.

"I suppose they won't mind——" said Delia doubtfully.

"Of course they won't. They like it," Joanna reassured her. "Every time Helen has a cold bath in a saucer she thinks she's being a hardy modern girl, and

every time Michael has a tepid drink he remembers that in England he probably wouldn't be having one at all. Besides, the people in the hotel think they're lovers. Helen told me so."

"Why," said Alice, "that's swell. There's nothing you English enjoy more, when you're abroad—I've always noticed it—than living like monks and having people go around saying you're hot stuff. It's funny. The French don't look at it that way at all. They aim to have their fun and make people think they're living like nuns all of the time. I guess your two young friends are feeling mighty pleased with themselves."

The notion of Helen, with her air of Head-Girl-plus-Senior-Monitor with a top-dressing of the London School of Economics, rejoicing secretly in an undeserved reputation for gallantry, was a novel one to Delia; but she decided that Alice Birkendorf-Speed was probably right, and she felt sure that Helen's predicament, if predicament it could be called, would be approved enthusiastically by Mrs. Garland as part of what she classed as Necessary Experience. She decided that Helen and Michael must remain at the Goldene Esel, since they had discovered and seemed to like that curious hotel, while the rest of them transferred themselves thankfully to Venetia's villa. She wondered how much David would enjoy associating with Venetia's admittedly peculiar friends. She felt no hesitation in accepting the arrangement on behalf of Rupert. Rupert, she knew, took a vaguely anthropological interest in freaks, and, when tired of them, was perfectly happy by himself on a mountain. But David was

far less accommodating, and she felt that if Nicki von Schwarzach were going to frequent the villa, it would only be a matter of time before David threw him into the river, which ran so turbulently and temptingly at the bottom of the garden. She realized, with a sigh, that in order to satisfy David's requirements in the matter of a perfect holiday, it would be necessary to take a secluded cottage, and arrange for other members of the party to be out all day, in order that she and David might spend long hours sitting in the garden while she did a little embroidery and David lay on the grass at her feet and murmured snatches of Celtic balladry on the recurring theme of the mortality of man. It was a pretty picture, and she had no doubt that it was David's notion of the right reward for his efforts as organizer of the expedition; but to her it savoured of monotony in comparison with the highly coloured life of Venetia's villa. Besides, there was Rupert to be considered. Lately, Delia had felt sometimes that she did not consider Rupert enough. Rupert was her husband, and, as such, she was glad to think that she had always given him full measure of consideration. She had been strictly faithful to him; she had seen to it that his bed was comfortable, his clothes aired, and his breakfast varied and hot; she had never contradicted him, and had taken interest in all those matters which he wished to discuss, and in none of those which he wished to keep to himself. Moreover, she had induced David Herald to perform those tiresome little duties which commonly devolve upon husbands, such as mending electric fuses, extracting information

from Bradshaw, and arranging for the decarbonizing of the car. In these respects, Delia felt that she had nothing with which to reproach herself. But Rupert was also very sweet, and very devoted. It occurred to her that in the course of the last year she had not paid sufficient attention to Rupert's charm and devotion. She had fallen into the habit of taking them for granted. Her rediscovery of these aspects of Rupert had made the journey to Salzburg a memorable one, and perhaps it was for this reason that she felt a little out of sympathy with David and his refusal to be contented in any company but hers. "David," she thought, "has no right to be so superior, and to complain that he finds Joanna irritating. If he doesn't like Venetia's freak friends whom he'll meet at the Villa, that'll be all the more reason for him to make the best of Joanna, who's a very nice, cheerful creature, and he ought to be thankful that there's such an attractive and good-humoured girl in the party, instead of sulking whenever I'm not there. So much for David Herald!"

CHAPTER XII

MICHAEL emerged from the Opera House after *Tristan* feeling exhausted but jubilant. The heat had been terrific, the discomfort acute and the music overwhelming. He had enjoyed every moment of it. Deafened, and delirious with emotional repletion and physical emptiness, he staggered into the first café which he saw. Here he found Mr. Wiggins. This surprised him, for it was very late, and Mr. Wiggins had not been to the opera and should therefore have been in bed long ago. Michael ordered beer and *Schinken-mit-Ei*, and sat down at Mr. Wiggins's table. He said:

"God, Wagner's incredible!"

Mr. Wiggins sighed. "Young man's music, you know. I haven't the physique for it nowadays, I'm afraid." He added wistfully, "I wish *I* were a young man."

"Oh, come," said Michael kindly, "don't talk as if you were Methuselah. You're just about in your prime." Privately he still regarded Mr. Wiggins as the amiable dotard which he had always been considered by the boys to whom he taught music; but in the expansive mood induced by the recollection of *Tristan* and the prospect of ham and eggs, he was prepared to say anything which might cheer the poor old man.

He looked at him with benevolent interest. Mr. Wiggins had sandy grey hair; and his face was also rather sand-coloured, with grey eyes and a bushy grey moustache, so that the general effect was an unobtrusive pepper-and-salt colour scheme. He seemed to be very despondent. Michael slapped him on the back, and said encouragingly: "You mustn't talk of being old for at least another twenty years."

Mr. Wiggins brightened somewhat. "I don't *feel* old," he said apologetically. "At least, not here in Salzburg, with all you cheerful people, and the—the fun, and everything. But when the term begins again, and I'm back in the Common Room with Smith and Richards and the rest, and there's that smell of varnish, and that extraordinary mixture of the noises of various instruments coming from the practising rooms—have you ever noticed what a depressing sound that is, from the outside?—somehow I begin to feel old again automatically. Damn it, I've been in the place for twenty-five years. I'm fifty-four."

"Good Lord!" said Michael, astounded. Without having given any thought to the matter, he had always assumed that Mr. Wiggins must be about seventy.

Mr. Wiggins mistook the cause of his surprise. "I suppose it seems an immense age to you," he said gloomily. "I know most people think me a regular old fogey—especially—well, especially *ladies*." He sighed profoundly.

"On the contrary," said Michael, "it wasn't that which surprised me. It was——" He hesitated, because he realized that it would be rude to admit that

he was surprised at discovering that Mr. Wiggins was not twenty years older; and, with the new unscrupulousness which he had acquired with his hat, he continued mendaciously: "I simply can't understand how you can call fifty-four *old*. It's a fine age—the best, for a man. And, of course, everyone thinks you're years younger."

Mr. Wiggins's sandy face became quite rosy with pleasure. He was, however, a literal man; and, in spite of his nervousness, he could not forbear to ask for an elucidation of Michael's vague statement. He said:

"My dear boy, when you say 'Everyone thinks so,' you're pulling my leg."

Having embarked on the project of raising Mr. Wiggins's spirits by lowering his apparent age, Michael was determined to carry it out successfully. "One or two more thumping lies and some more beer," he thought, "and the old boy will go home fairly rollicking." He ordered the beer, and said to Mr. Wiggins:

"Well, I can tell you of one person in particular who'd never believe that you're fifty-four—Miss Talbot."

Mr. Wiggins's rosy flush deepened to an alarming crimson, and he choked over his beer. He then wiped his forehead in an agitated fashion with a bandanna handkerchief, and choked again. Michael, wondering if these were the preliminary symptoms of apoplexy, watched him anxiously. At length Mr. Wiggins said, in hoarse and urgent tones:

"I insist on your telling me exactly what grounds you have for saying that."

Michael stretched his long legs under the table, and congratulated himself on being in such a fine imaginative mood.

"As a matter of fact," he said, composing himself with relish to the romantic task before him, "Miss Talbot was asking me yesterday if you had really taught me music at my preparatory school. She could hardly believe it."

"Why not?" demanded Mr. Wiggins, whose natural modesty led him to assume instantly that Miss Talbot must, by some hideous mischance, have heard Michael attempting to play the viola.

"She couldn't believe that you were teaching anyone as long ago as that," Michael answered readily. "She said she thought it was noble, but mistaken of you to devote your youth to making boys understand music when you ought to be composing and creating music for posterity."

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Wiggins softly. "My youth! Did she say that?"

Michael nodded. Miss Talbot, he remembered, had actually observed that it was stupid of Mr. Wiggins to go on wasting his talents on a lot of idle boys when there was probably more money to be made out of composing the music for light operas, which task, she had assumed, would present no difficulties to him. Michael smiled complacently at his own paraphrase of her remark; and then it occurred to him that further capital might be made out of the light opera suggestion. He continued earnestly:

"She thinks, you know, that you'd be a second

Strauss if you stopped teaching and gave your time to it."

"Strauss!" Mr. Wiggins, whose god was Handel, was visibly shaken.

Michael added hurriedly: "That's because she hasn't heard you play, of course, and has no idea what you go in for. Her own musical taste isn't much to boast of, poor dear, and naturally she thinks of your talents as being in the line that she likes herself."

This speech at once annoyed Mr. Wiggins and provoked his curiosity, as Michael had intended that it should. He said sharply:

"I don't know what right you have to speak slightingly of Miss Talbot's musical taste. Her taste seems to me to be excellent in every respect. And what exactly do you mean by 'naturally'?"

Michael drank some more beer and paused before he answered. Then, gazing into his beer-mug, he said with well-assumed diffidence:

"I'm afraid, sir, that you've never been in love yourself, or you wouldn't have asked that—that rather heartless question."

"Never been in love—my God!" Mr. Wiggins fetched a sigh that fairly stirred the cardboard beer-mats on the table. "And you actually suggest that I could ask a heartless question about anything which concerns that charming—that . . . about anything which concerns Miss Talbot? Boy," cried Mr. Wiggins, turning on Michael and suddenly relapsing into his preparatory-school manner, "you're out of your senses!"

"A heartless question," Michael repeated firmly. The good dark beer had a strong hold upon him by now, and he almost believed that he was carrying out a sacred mission to plead the cause of a lovelorn and neglected damsel, instead of telling lies about the austere Miss Talbot, who would almost certainly have boxed his ears if she had overheard a tenth part of their conversation. He returned Mr. Wiggins's indignant gaze reproachfully, and added: "I don't doubt that you've been in love, but you can't have *suffered,* or you'd be able to recognize suffering in others."

"What others?" demanded Mr. Wiggins wildly. He had by this time a very fair notion of what Michael meant, and it intoxicated him even more than three large mugs of dark beer had intoxicated Michael; nevertheless he felt that he must get Michael to explain himself in so many words.

"I mean," said Michael, with intense and slightly drunken solemnity, "the unfortunate Miss Talbot. I say 'unfortunate,' because only those of us who have been through what she's going through—poor, gallant Miss Talbot!—know just how unfortunate is the person who suffers dumbly, whose devotion must be kept hidden, whose pride covers a breaking heart. It's not easy, I dare say, for most people to understand. But for some of us——" Michael closed his eyes, and tried to remember for whose sake it was that he suffered dumbly. After a very little consideration he remembered that it was Delia, and realized with a pleasant pang of self-pity that out of sight was indeed out of Delia's mind for him, and that even when in

sight she probably had him in mind only when she wanted a match for her cigarette. He felt a great glow of sympathy for Miss Talbot in her imaginary predicament. To yearn in vain for an unresponsive and unrealizing Delia might be heart-breaking, but it was a noble misfortune; but to have Mr. Wiggins as an object of unrequited affection was sheer bad luck, and an intolerable position for any woman of spirit. Michael quite forgot that he had invented Miss Talbot's hopeless passion in order to enliven his despondent companion. He opened his eyes and fixed them malevolently upon Mr. Wiggins and said: "I repeat, for those of us who have been through the hill—I mean mill—or hoop—for those of us who *understand*, it's easy enough to see what that brave, unhappy Miss Talbot is suffering on account of you."

"Stop, stop!" cried Mr. Wiggins, in the utmost agitation, clutching at his arm. "I understand you—at least, I think I do. It's unbelievable—I can't realize it—that wonderful woman! And you say that she's actually *suffering*? I mean, that she thinks I . . . Oh, it's amazing! And that I, who wouldn't harm a hair of her head, should have caused her a moment's unhappiness! I can't bear it. I must go to that *pension* at once and see her, and tell her. . . ."

"You can't, now. It's too late," said Michael.

"What do you mean—too late?" Mr. Wiggins almost shouted.

"I mean that it's twenty minutes to two, and that she has been in bed for hours," Michael replied soothingly. Now that Mr. Wiggins had shown a proper

spirit in the matter of Miss Talbot's broken heart, he felt more kindly towards him again. "There's nothing to be done to-night. To-morrow morning——"

"First thing," said Mr. Wiggins. "First thing." He mopped his forehead again, and added unexpectedly: "Then we must have some beer. This is all very agitating. *Fräulein! Noch zwei grosse Dunkle, bitte.*"

Michael's mild moroseness, induced by the comparison of his own hopeless love affairs with the no longer hopeless, and in any case non-existent love affairs of Miss Talbot, vanished with his fourth mug of beer. He remembered Venetia, and, while lending a semi-attentive ear to the almost incoherent ejaculations of the ecstatic Mr. Wiggins, he was wondering whether his own heart, already agreeably broken by Delia, were not in fact subdivided as a result of meeting Venetia. He was still exploring in his mind this delightfully tragic possibility when he parted from Mr. Wiggins at the door of the latter's hotel. Mr. Wiggins could scarcely find words with which to thank Michael for the service which he had rendered him. His gratitude was even further stressed when he remembered that it was to Michael that he owed his introduction to the adorable Miss Talbot. He fidgeted about on the steps of his hotel, babbling confusedly about happiness and the fulfilment of dreams, and Michael's early promise as a viola player, and the coincidence of meeting an old pupil in a café, and the smallness of the world. Michael leaned against a pillar, smiling amiably, and mentally contrasting Delia's restful loveliness with

Venetia's energetic beauty. Finally, Mr. Wiggins came close to him and said with immense earnestness:

"Michael, there's only one way in which I can show my gratitude, and I'll do it. Do you know that I have . . . composed . . . a concerto?"

"Not really!" said Michael, wrenching his thoughts away from the two goddesses of his preoccupation, and fixing them upon the well-remembered sight of Mr. Wiggins seated at the piano in his dingy study at St. Olaf's House.

"Yes. A concerto. Michael, it shall be dedicated to you. I've been wishing—I'll confess it to you now—I've been wishing, quite hopelessly, of course, for the last few days, that I could dedicate it to *her*. But she's the soul of generosity, and she'd be the first person, I know, to agree that it ought to be dedicated to you as a sign of my great gratitude—yes, my dear boy, my *very* great gratitude to you for having brought us together."

Michael bowed solemnly. "I haven't done much," he said, with a little deprecating cough. "I don't deserve such an honour at all. If I have helped to make two people happy, that's all the reward I want. When one has missed happiness oneself, it's a great consolation if one can bring it to others." He sighed profoundly, bowed again, backed successfully down the steps, and vanished in the direction of the Getreide-gasse, leaving Mr. Wiggins standing in the doorway looking more bewildered than ever.

It was after two o'clock when Michael reached the Goldene Esel, and he was surprised to find Frau Hofer

in the hall. Frau Hofer launched herself towards him with her characteristic balloon-like swoop, seized him by the arm, and pointed towards the door of the small salon. With a more menacing leer than usual, she approached her face close to his ear, and hissed:

"Where have you been so long, Herr Park? You should not leave the Fräulein so—it is foolish. She is in there, talking—with *your friend*. The dark one. The others, they come in, they go to their rooms, they are asleep. But since midnight the Fräulein has been in the salon—*with him*—and now it is more than two o'clock. *What shall you do?*"

The indescribable mixture of gloating anticipation and ghoulish triumph in Frau Hofer's hoarse whisper almost froze Michael's blood. She kept her eyes fixed on the door of the salon, like a cat watching a mouse-hole, and maintained her grasp on Michael's arm. He felt obliged to answer her in the same conspiratorial undertone.

"Do?" he whispered angrily. "What d'you expect me to do?"

Frau Hofer's grip on his arm tightened. "Herr Park," she hissed, "I beg you, no violence. This is a good hotel. It has a good reputation. There must be no quarrelling—I insist. No loud words, and no blows, if you please. You are angry—that is only natural——"

"Angry! And I should like to know who wouldn't be!" Michael interrupted in an enraged undertone, wrenching his arm away from Frau Hofer. Indeed, he felt that if anyone were in danger of receiving a

blow it was Frau Hofer, whose nauseating obsession on the subject of his relations with Helen was fast becoming intolerable. He had entered the Goldene Esel in a mood of delightful melancholy, thinking about his hopeless attachment to two exquisite and unattainable women; and this luxurious mood had been shattered instantly by the gross insinuations of the horrible Hofer, who expected him to suffer transports of jealousy because a smug and sturdy little English miss was having a conversation in the salon with a tedious mutual acquaintance. Much beer and the consequent contemplation of his blighted life had robbed Michael of such sense of humour as he had ever possessed; and the abrupt descent from his own dreams of his imaginary romantic troubles to Frau Hofer's equally imaginary version of them made him quite inarticulate with rage. He glared at her, speechless. Frau Hofer, whose vast bosom heaved with such excitement that her garnet *parure* rose and fell amid the Maltese lace, continued urgently:

"Herr Park, I understand how you are angry—for a man it is always the same. *Himmel!* when I remember Herr Hofer!—but I implore you to do nothing until to-morrow, for my sake. To-night, for the sake of the hotel, there must be peace. I have thought of a plan. Go out again for one moment—for only two moments—into the street. I will tell the Fräulein that I have seen you coming, and she will fly, the little naughty one, up to her room. Then when you come in she will not be there, and you will know nothing—at least, until to-morrow." With an appalling wink Frau

Hofer started to propel him towards the street door.

Michael stood his ground, and said in a hoarse and infuriated whisper: "Madam, this is monstrous. It's gone on long enough, and I won't stand it for another moment."

"To-morrow—only wait for the morning!" moaned Frau Hofer frantically. "To-morrow you can kill him—you can go with him up the Gaisberg and shoot him—but to-night I beg you to do as I say. Quick—they are coming out. . . ."

With surprising energy she ran him across the hall and pushed him out of the door. Michael, whose balance was not of the steadiest, not unnaturally failed to take the steps in his involuntary stride. He fell heavily on his knees on the pavement. While he picked himself up, which he did very laboriously and sadly, he reflected gloomily that the charm of even as attractive an hotel as the Goldene Esel began to wear remarkably thin when the proprietress constantly pushed you down the steps into the street. He had felt sufficiently foolish, he remembered, on the previous occasion, when she had thrust him forth so that he might buy a bunch of wild flowers for a young woman in whom he took very little interest indeed; but when it came to being ejected in order that he might avoid meeting the same young woman because she had been conversing at a late hour with a fellow guest, and it was assumed that bloodshed must inevitably result from the encounter, it was altogether past bearing, Michael thought. He dusted himself as best he could, felt his knee-caps dejectedly, and was surprised

to find them still in order, and toiled up the steps again.

In the hall stood David Herald, looking sleepy; Helen, looking alert but puzzled; and Frau Hofer, looking like a congested and frantic toad. Before Michael could say anything Frau Hofer dashed towards him making agitated gestures, and exclaimed wildly:

"Herr Park, you have met with an accident! What has happened to you, tell me? You look so *white*, and you are all covered up with dust on your *trousers*. Have you perhaps been attacked by some drunk fellow? Yes, that must be it, I am sure of it. What a *terrible* thing, here in our Salzburg!"

Michael could not but admire the monstrous aplomb with which she uttered this impromptu explanation of his sudden appearance in a dishevelled state. He looked at the others. A comprehending grin was spreading over David's sleepy face. Helen came towards him with a murmur of concern, and looked up at him with an earnest mixture of commiseration and reproach. He realized suddenly that he was indeed dusty and dishevelled, that there was a triangular cut in the knee of his trousers, that he was swaying slightly as he stood in the middle of the hall, and that he was probably accompanied by a tremendous smell of beer. He drew himself up, and said superbly:

"Thank you. The only drunk fellow I have met to-night is myself."

CHAPTER XIII

MICHAEL awoke to find Helen, gaily attired in a fresh print frock, but looking a trifle severe, standing by his bedside. In her hands she held a tray.

"I thought perhaps you'd like your breakfast in here to-day, so that you need not get up to have it," she said. "I told Rosa to bring another tray because you weren't feeling very well."

"How kind of you," said Michael, stretching luxuriously under the bedclothes and smoothing back his tousled hair. "I don't know why, though, because I feel remarkably well."

Helen stared at him reproachfully. "But, Michael, you were drunk last night."

"Not particularly — and extremely pleasantly." Michael yawned, and sat up and balanced his tray on his knees. "My poor child, did you expect to find me pale and groaning? What a sell!—because I feel like a king."

Helen sat on the edge of his bed and watched him pour out his coffee. Michael felt sure that she was waiting to see if his hand trembled, and he experienced a strong desire to giggle. Helen said earnestly:

"Michael, dear. I do wish that you'd try not to—for my sake."

It seemed to Michael that he had heard that remark

a very short time ago from someone else. Casting his mind back while he buttered his roll, and while Helen sat watching him with an intense and would-be understanding gaze, he remembered that Frau Hofer had begged him, for her sake, to avoid a clash with David Herald. In the sober light of day the outrageous scene in the hall appeared to him extraordinarily funny. He gave a shout of laughter, and said:

"Do you know what that old trull, Frau Hofer, thought last night? She waylaid me when I came in to tell me that you and David were in the salon, and to implore me not to kill David in the hotel."

"Not to kill David?" repeated the literal Helen, puzzled. "But why should you? You must have misunderstood her, Michael. She can't have said that."

"She thought," explained Michael patiently, "that I should be mad with jealousy, and thirsting for David's blood. Before I could get a word in she pushed me down the steps into the street for fear I should come face to face with you in the hall. I cut my knees and made a great hole in my dress trousers. But I still think it was frightfully funny."

To his horror, Helen suddenly bent over him and laid a loving hand on his shoulder, blushing deeply. She said:

"Dear Michael, don't think I don't know what you really feel—because I do understand, absolutely. And I know I did sit up rather late with David, but I knew you wouldn't mind. He was depressed—he had rather a gloomy trip out here, and he was feeling hurt about the rooms he'd taken so much trouble to find, which

nobody would occupy. So I was doing my best to cheer him up, and I didn't quite realize how late it was. But, Michael, when I saw you come in looking so queer—and then you said you were drunk—I felt *awful*. It's not that I don't understand, because I do; but you'll make me terribly unhappy if you start drinking, dear. Will you promise me to make a great effort to stop it?"

While Helen was delivering this speech, Michael stared at her over the tray with a growing sensation of panic. If Frau Hofer and Helen were both going to assure him incessantly that they understood him, and if what they believed that they understood was his burning passion for Helen, he felt that life at the Goldene Esel would soon be quite intolerable. Michael cast wildly about in his mind for some means of explaining to Helen, without discourtesy, that he was not in love with her, or jealous of her, or taking to drink on her account; and that if he was in love with anyone—a matter on which he felt less certain at the prosaic hour of breakfast than he had felt the night before—then it was Delia whom he loved, or Venetia, or indeed both of them, and not Helen at all. Twice he opened his mouth to speak and then remained silent, because he could think of no suitable words with which to express himself without making Helen feel a fool and himself a cad. Helen sat watching him anxiously, bending over the tray and gazing into his eyes so that he could not even eat without embarrassment. In despair, Michael leaned back on the pillows, closed his eyes and said feebly:

"Look here, Helen, I'm afraid I am going to have

a headache after all. It's just beginning. Perhaps if I were alone for a bit, and didn't talk——"

Helen rose at once, laid a compassionate and rather hot little hand on his brow for an instant, and crept out of the room. As soon as Michael heard the door close behind her he sat up and finished his breakfast hungrily, making as he did so a series of wild plans for escaping from the awkward situation which Helen and Frau Hofer—that strange pair of unconscious collaborators—had created for him. Each plan had to be rejected as being either embarrassing or discreditable, or both. He toyed longest with the notion of making obvious and energetic advances to Venetia upon every occasion when Helen was present, but he had a strong feeling that Venetia might resent this and contrive without much difficulty to make him look ridiculous—and, in any case, Helen was perfectly capable of considering his behaviour as evidence of his anxiety to conceal his secret passion for *her*.

While he was dressing David came in, yawning. Michael thought that David looked as if he would have benefited more from a few hours of extra sleep than from the cheering-up process to which Helen had devoted so much time. He seemed gloomy, and sat on Michael's bed and watched him dress. He said:

"We've got to shift over to that damned villa this morning—at least, the Temple-Cheynes and Joanna and I have. I rather envy you and Helen staying on here."

Michael was surprised. "But I thought you didn't think much of this place? I admit it's rather primitive."

"Oh, I don't know," said David, looking round the bare, bright, whitewashed room, and contrasting it mentally with the glimpse he had had of the interior of the Villa Mitzi with its inordinate amount of gilding and mirrors and tassels and fringes, and its general air of rather dusty second-rate luxury. "Personally, I haven't the least objection to a cold bath in a tin saucer. I've just had one. I'd a damn sight sooner put up with that, and with having to hang my entire wardrobe on a nail on the back of the door, than go and wallow among the bloody little pink satin bolsters at that villa, listening to Venetia Strange's insane friends screeching like a gaggle of parakeets all day."

While David was speaking, Michael had a sudden inspiration, which delighted him so much that he turned away and began to brush his teeth lest David should notice his elation. "If," thought Michael, "David dislikes the idea of going to stay at the Villa, then, by heaven, he shall stay here with Helen and I'll go instead!" The more he thought of this plan, the more it pleased him. He saw, however, that he would have to proceed very carefully, because unless David believed that the suggestion was his own, he would never agree to it. Moreover, Michael realized that to detach David Herald from the constant companionship of Delia, in circumstances of comparative *confort moderne*, and to offer him instead the society of Helen in the rigorous surroundings of the Goldene Esel, was, for all David might say about tin baths and parakeets, a difficult proposition.

He began, cautiously: "I suppose staying at the

Villa would mean seeing a good deal of Lady Venetia's friends. Are they very peculiar?"

"Peculiar! My God!" said David, with feeling. "Joanna dragged me in there last night after dinner because they were playing roulette. I never saw such a crew. Americans and gigolos and a couple of crazy chaps who'd just flown here from Paris simply in order to hear Toscanini conduct at one concert—imagine, all that sweat when you can hear the fellow on a gramophone record!—and God knows who else. Mostly foreigners, of course. Joanna seemed to enjoy herself all right. She rooked a wall-eyed American who ran the bank, and says she'll stand us all lunch with the proceeds."

"I can imagine," said Michael, seeing a new avenue of approach to his project, "that you've been finding Joanna's extreme jollity a bit of a strain on the journey out here?"

"Joanna," said David emphatically, "is one of the most maddening girls I've ever met. She can't keep still and she can't keep silent for five seconds. What's more, she will *sing*—frightful nasal songs about cuties and big boys."

Michael thought that perhaps even Joanna's cuties and big boys might be less distressing than David's everlasting corpses in their grassy graves, but he kept this reflection to himself.

David concluded gloomily: "And now, just when I thought I was due for a little peace and quiet, I'm pitchforked into this madhouse of Venetia's."

"It's a pity, in a way, that Helen couldn't have gone

to the Villa instead of Joanna. She'd have been a far more restful element there," Michael observed craftily.

To his delight, David agreed with him cordially. "She would, indeed," he said. "I hadn't realized, till last night, what a charming, sensible girl Helen is. We had a long crack in that sitting-room after we all came in and the others had gone up to bed. She's getting more attractive every day, too. It's such a relief to see that lovely natural colouring after watching Joanna decorating her face every half-hour for the last week."

This was certainly promising. Michael said thoughtfully: "I'm afraid we'd never induce Joanna to stay here and let Helen go to the Villa."

David shook his head. "Not a chance of it. She's looking forward to the Villa—and so are Rupert and Delia; which seems extraordinary to me. Of course, Venetia's an old friend of theirs, so it may be that. I must say, if it weren't for being separated from them, I'd give anything to get out of it.

Michael had just decided that this was the strategic moment at which to come to the point, when Delia's voice was heard calling "David!" from the landing.

David jumped up from the bed at once and hurried to the door. Delia, all in white, and wearing one of the scarlet blossoms from Michael's herbaceous bouquet, was standing in a patch of sunlight in the passage.

"Good morning, dear David," she said, and added, seeing Michael over David's shoulder, "and good morning, dear Michael. I hope you both feel splendid in this glorious town. *I* feel like the Queen of the Fairies."

"You look it," said David earnestly.

Delia smiled, and made a small apologetic gesture. "It's nice of you to say that, David, because I'm afraid I'm going to behave like a pig. At least, slightly like a pig. Didn't I say I'd go out with you this morning and bathe?"

"You did," replied David, with a sigh.

"Well, darling, I'm going to abandon you, and you must forgive me, because Rupert has just come in with two tickets for a Bruno Walter concert at the Mozarteum—a concert with a quite miraculously lovely programme—and is waiting to take me. I apologize, David—in fact, I grovel. . . ."

"For goodness' sake, don't talk about grovelling in connexion with you," said David miserably. "It's so very unsuitable. We can bathe this afternoon."

"Well, this afternoon we have to move to the Villa, which will take time, and Venetia will be surprised if we just cast our suitcases into her pink satin suites and then hurry off to some lake. Why don't the rest of you go and bathe this morning? And then we'll all meet for luncheon, and you can tell us how well you swam, and we'll tell you how well we listened."

With a final apologetic wave of her hand, Delia vanished round the corner of the staircase to join Rupert in the hall. Michael could picture him standing there waiting, without the slightest sensation of impatience, and smiling when he saw Delia. So could David. He went back into Michael's room and sat down heavily on the bed again.

"Damn that Villa!" he said bitterly. "It's

going to ruin this holiday for me, I can see."

"It's frightfully bad luck," agreed Michael, trying not to sound too cheerful, "that you should have been let in for staying there. It wouldn't have mattered nearly so much for me, for instance. I can stand quite a lot of Joanna and even the kind of people who go to the Villa. They amuse me. And living in the house of anyone as lovely as Lady Venetia Strange would compensate me for a lot of disadvantages. However, it can't be helped, of course."

To his extreme joy, a sudden expression of relief appeared on David's face. Michael waited expectantly, and David said with some diffidence:

"I suppose you wouldn't actually care to go and stay at the Villa instead of me? I could take over your room here. Of course, if you'd rather not, don't think of it for a moment. It's only a suggestion——"

Michael affected to consider. "I don't see why not," he said. "It makes no difference to me where I sleep, and I don't mind being involved in the parties at the Villa, whereas you want to avoid them——"

"It's not that I want to avoid Rupert and Delia, God knows," David interrupted hastily. "But I do think I'd have more chance of seeing something of them in peace if I stayed here."

"At the Villa you'd never get them away from the others, but if you were here you could always manage to lure them out," Michael agreed. "All right, David, we'll change places. We'll tell Frau Hofer that I'm leaving and that you'll be keeping on my room."

"There's Helen, though," objected David, looking worried. "She'll have to be consulted. She may not like the idea of changing you for me as a fellow outside-boarder."

"Oh, I don't suppose Helen will mind," said Michael hurriedly. He foresaw that Helen might quite possibly raise obstacles to his plan if it were laid before her—the kind of unsurmountable obstacles which are created by a tone of voice and a resigned but regretful expression—and he was anxious to make the transfer irrevocable before she could be consulted. "We'd better go and tell Frau Hofer at once, I think, to save her extra trouble. There's only one maid in this hotel, and we don't want her to have to make the beds twice."

This was an ingenious suggestion. David was a considerate man and liked consideration in other people. Thoughtfulness for Rosa, necessitating prompt action, triumphed over thoughtfulness for Helen, which would have entailed delay. He agreed to go down and speak to Frau Hofer while Michael packed.

Since most of his belongings were still in his suitcase and the remainder either hanging from a nail on the door or stacked on the window-seat, Michael's packing took him only a few minutes. When he reached the hall he was alarmed to find David deep in conversation with Helen. To his surprise and relief, Helen hastened to meet him with a beaming smile and said:

"Michael, dear, I do think it's such a good idea that you should change places with David, and let

him have your room here while you go to the Villa. I was telling David that it's a perfectly splendid plan."

Michael felt greatly relieved, but slightly puzzled, by Helen's unexpected enthusiasm about the new arrangement. He said jocularly to David:

"You certainly score, David. She obviously prefers your company to mine as a fellow inmate."

"Oh, Michael, you *know* it's not that," Helen said reproachfully. "But of course you'd rather be at the Villa—you'll feel so much freer there. It's an ideal arrangement."

"As a matter of fact, Michael's only doing it to get me out of that awful household of gigolos and babies and lunatic foreigners," David explained. "It's really very good of him."

Michael was glad to be reminded of his supposed sacrifice on David's behalf, because he had almost lost sight of it in his elation at the success of his scheme. He was at a loss to explain Helen's theory about his enhanced sense of freedom, however, and this mystified him extremely. "What does the girl suppose I shall be free to do at the Villa which I can't do here?" he wondered: and instantly the answer presented itself to him: "To make love to her, of course." The more Michael considered this alarming explanation of her remark, the more convinced he became that it was the correct one. Without having made any special effort to do so, he had come to know Helen very well during their visit to Salzburg. Having spent most of his waking hours in her sole company for the past ten days, he had become perfectly familiar with her mental

processes. What look, what word or gesture, had put it into her head that he was languishing for love of her, he could not imagine; but if he had indeed been so unfortunate as to give her that impression, then he could follow her reactions with perfect ease. She would think, of course, that he was inhibited by considerations of honour from so much as hinting at his feelings while staying alone with her at the Goldene Esel. Hence her references, so frequent of late, to understanding his feelings. Now that he was about to take up his abode under another roof, she obviously believed that nothing remained to prevent him from declaring himself at the first opportunity.

When Michael realized this implication of his successful stratagem, he broke into a sweat of nervous horror. He and Helen and David were walking down the Getreide-gasse, and Helen was enjoying the opportunity of pointing out architectural curiosities to David, being careful to do so in such a merry manner that David thoroughly enjoyed her little disquisitions, and quite overlooked the occasional technicalities which could not be avoided. They were going to call for Joanna at a hairdresser's shop, and Helen expressed indulgent amusement at Joanna's determination to have her hair curled before seeing so much as Mozart's birthplace or even a Salzburg hat. This, too, was appreciated by David, who enjoyed any gibe at Joanna's expense, but approved of Helen's kindly method of mockery. Michael groaned inwardly as he walked beside them. "Nobody," he thought bitterly, "was ever in such a ludicrous predicament. I make the most

elaborate plans to get myself into the same house with Delia and that exquisite Venetia Strange, at the same time providing Helen with a perfect companion and chaperon in the person of David Herald; the plan has, in addition, the obvious advantage of removing David from the position of acknowledged handyman to Delia, and substituting myself—and then comes this monstrous complication of Helen's idiotic idea that I am in love with her. It only remains for Joanna to assume that I am ready to cut my throat if she won't marry me out of hand. What a shocking waste of a beautiful plan, carried out with masterly skill in the face of David's well-known Scottish obstinacy and suspicion."

As if to confirm Michael's melancholy belief that the crisis of his misfortunes must be imminent, Joanna attached herself to him in the most obvious fashion when she emerged from the hairdresser's shop. She was looking very cocky and becurled, in the particular form of jaunty artificiality which she affected, and David had occasion once again to compare her candidly applied cosmetics unfavourably with Helen's glowing natural colour and nice little freckles.

Joanna seized upon Michael with considerable relief. She had enjoyed baiting David during the journey to Salzburg, conscious that she was subtly and secretly abetted by Rupert—and the realization that she had the divine Rupert's sympathy in any undertaking would have made it doubly agreeable. But Joanna was a kind-hearted girl, and she liked, if possible, to console those whom she tormented. David had been a suitable subject for torment, but he had shown him-

self singularly averse from consolation. The pleasure of tormenting him had begun to pall, therefore; and Joanna welcomed the prospect of a light-hearted frolic with Michael. She knew that now there would be no question of alternating a successful leg-pull with a sentimental passage, because with Michael she could so easily blend those two important ingredients of what she considered successful social intercourse. Michael had always shown himself favourably disposed towards her exuberant methods of conversation, except when she made too many bad jokes; and he was equally willing to have his hair pulled, to pull hers, and to hold her hand in cinemas and the back seats of motor-cars and other places appropriate to this mild concession to sentiment. In fact, as a holiday companion he was greatly to be preferred to David, who glared when he was laughed at, and recoiled in alarm if one as much as tweaked his ear. Michael, looking surprisingly debonair in his Tyrolese hat, was a most welcome substitute. "Helen can have David for a bit," thought Joanna, slipping her arm into Michael's.

Michael was oddly unresponsive, Joanna discovered, as they strolled across the bridge. He seemed preoccupied, and was not even particularly enthusiastic about his arrangement to change places with David at the Villa. Joanna was at a loss to understand this, until it occurred to her that perhaps Michael had lost his heart to Helen during their ten days alone together, and was depressed by the prospect of being separated from her. When they had found a table at the Café Bazar, and were drinking beer, she noticed that Helen

was casting an occasional long and loving glance at Michael, and this confirmed her suspicions. "How ridiculous," thought Joanna crossly. "That's just the kind of idiocy that ruins a good party. Thank heaven, when *I* take a fancy to anyone it doesn't make me intense. I've adored Rupert madly all the way across France and Germany, and I got more cheerful every minute. A good adoration's as encouraging as a new hat any day."

Her reflections were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Wiggins and Miss Talbot, who were observed threading their way among the tables to join them. Mr. Wiggins wore just that expression of bemused blissfulness with which he listened to his favourite musicians. Miss Talbot's becoming sunburn was augmented by a decided flush, and she appeared, for such a self-possessed person, to be almost bashful. They seated themselves between Helen and Michael, and Mr. Wiggins said at once:

"I think this is both the right time and the right place—don't you?"

"For what?" Miss Talbot asked nervously.

"For blowing the gaff," replied Mr. Wiggins, with unbelievable jocularity. "For letting the cat out of the bag, or however you choose to put it." It was obvious to everyone but Mr. Wiggins that Miss Talbot would never have chosen to put it like that, whatever it was, but Mr. Wiggins continued merrily: "Michael should be the first person to hear the news, because it's all his fault for introducing us."

Miss Talbot actually giggled. "*I* think *this* dear

child should be the first to know," she said, clasping Helen's arm fondly, " because if she hadn't made friends with me in the train I should never have known any of you."

Helen thought this was an odd description of her reluctant responses to Miss Talbot's stern catechism when approaching the Austrian frontier; but as she had no idea of what they were talking about she said nothing, and sat looking from one to the other in astonishment.

Mr. Wiggins breathed deeply, and beamed at Michael and then at Helen. He included Joanna and David in his expansive grin, although he had quite forgotten their names and was not at all certain if he even knew them.

" Well, here goes! " he said, with the new joviality which was so different from his usual nervous and precise manner of speaking. " I can't keep it to myself for another moment. Miss Talbot and I are engaged to be married."

Helen and Michael received this announcement with the utmost enthusiasm. Helen was genuinely astonished, and Michael gave Mr. Wiggins a benevolently understanding wink when Miss Talbot was not looking. David and Joanna provided a chorus of vague congratulations from the other side of the table.

"It's the romantic atmosphere of this town," Miss Talbot declared. "Things happen here that would never happen in England. I have *never* accepted a proposal of marriage in England; and Edward tells me that he has never even made one before."

"I'd have proposed to *you* if I had met you in—in Bayswater," said Mr. Wiggins instantly and without a blush.

Michael thought: "I'm very sure that you wouldn't, unless I'd been there first to tell you a packet of lies for lack of a better way of raising your spirits." He said aloud: "I'm going to order some drinks to celebrate this occasion."

"No—drinks are on me," David interrupted. "I haven't stood the party a drink since I arrived in this place, and in any case, Michael, you deserve a reward for changing places with me at the Goldene Esel."

"What's that?" asked Miss Talbot, surprised.

"David Herald is taking over Michael's room at our hotel, and Michael's going to the Villa Mitzi," Helen explained.

Miss Talbot looked frankly bewildered, and was obviously making an effort not to look shocked as well. "Just when I was getting accustomed to the idea of your being there with one young man," she said plaintively to Helen, "you exchange him for a different one. It certainly seems queer to me—but from what you tell me of your mother's views I suppose she would thoroughly approve of the arrangement." Miss Talbot sighed and drank some beer.

"Oh, rather," Helen assured her cheerfully. "Mother knows David quite well, you see. She wouldn't have the least objection."

"Personal knowledge of the—er—candidate is the only parental qualification, then?" said Miss Talbot, a trifle tartly. "I see."

Helen had embarked upon a further exposition of Rachel Garland's emancipated contempt for the conventions when Delia and Rupert appeared, accompanied by Venetia. Michael's spirits rose immediately when he found himself in the company of both his goddesses. In the general reshuffle which took place he managed to seat himself between them, and he was soon feeling so well pleased with his situation that he began to forget the complication of Helen and settled down to enjoy himself.

When the new arrivals had been invited to congratulate Miss Talbot and Mr. Wiggins, Helen explained once more the arrangement that David and Michael should change places.

Michael turned to Venetia and said: "I hope you don't mind having me as an inmate instead of David?"

"Not in the least," Venetia replied cheerfully. "David does sing so. I've got a nurse who can't stop singing hymns to my unfortunate Heir, and if we had David singing his everlasting churchyard songs as well, there'd be absolute pandemonium at the Villa. More, I mean, than there is already," she added. "You don't sing much, I hope?"

"Hardly ever," said Michael, "but Joanna does, incessantly."

"I'll order a lot of sweets, then," Venetia said resourcefully. "People can't sing and suck, you know, at the same time. I've always noticed it. We're all going for a picnic this afternoon." She leaned across the table and said to Miss Talbot: "You two are coming to my picnic, aren't you?"

"Really," said Miss Talbot, "it's very kind of you, but——"

"If I didn't insist on your coming Ma would never forgive me, now that I know what a crack you had together over the geraniums at the Flower Show," said Venetia firmly.

"Begonias," corrected Miss Talbot, brightening. "It was really most amusing. The gardener——"

David was saying to Delia in a low voice: "If I thought you'd really *mind* my not going to the Villa I'd cancel the arrangement at once. But I don't suppose you do, for an instant."

"No, darling, of course I don't," Delia answered, very sweetly. "I think it's a brilliant plan. After all, you *like* cold baths and things, and you don't much like V's friends, so what could be more sensible? And you see you're going to have your bathe to-day after all, because we're all going to this picnic this afternoon."

David gave a discreet groan which was audible to Delia alone. "I wanted to bathe with *you*," he said bitterly, "not with quantities of strange people. You know that. I don't think I shall attend this picnic."

"But, my sweet, there won't be enough cars without the Alvis," Delia murmured.

David sighed. "Oh, all right. Whose car did you think of going in?"

Delia was gazing over his head at the distant fortress and the domes and spires of the old town, and thinking that this was a perfect town, and that she was having a perfect holiday. She answered absently:

"In Rupert's."

CHAPTER XIV

David asked Helen to sit beside him in the Alvis when they were starting from the Villa for Venetia's picnic. Michael managed to secure the front seat of the Bentley and the sole company of Venetia, and felt quite intoxicated with triumph. Joanna, observing these manœuvres, remarked to Helen that it was just like being at school, and choosing one's partner in the crocodile for the Sunday walk to church. Helen had replied coldly that at St. Pryska's Ladies' College the crocodile formation had been discarded long before the war as being silly and undignified. She had added, in order to quell Joanna even more thoroughly: "If you knew my real reasons for going in the Alvis with David, you wouldn't think it funny at all."

Joanna puzzled over this remark as she sat in the back of the Talbot with Nicki von Schwarzach and a young man called Moult, who seemed to belong to Alice Birkendorf-Speed's party, but had crept into the Talbot and installed himself there with the furtive triumph of a stowaway. Nicki von Schwarzach upbraided him shrilly, as soon as they started, for having deserted his hostess; but Mr. Moult retaliated by pointing out to him that he had done exactly the same thing himself, with less excuse, since Alice had not boxed *his* ears during

luncheon. After this, Nicki ignored his two companions in the back of the car, and leaned forward and addressed himself exclusively to Delia. Delia responded politely, if vaguely, at first; but she gradually slipped down lower in her seat, and it was soon apparent that she was sleeping peacefully. Rupert had, as usual, opened all the windows and the sliding roof, and Nicki began to suffer acutely from the rush of air which blew his long hair into his eyes and flapped his pale green tie against his face. Joanna, who had evolved a satisfactory technique for resisting draughts in the Talbot, enjoyed herself heartily at his expense, and even went to the length of offering him a hair-net, to the manifest delight of Mr. Moult. She soon stopped trying to fathom the mysterious remark made by Helen before they started, and abandoned the whole problem of Helen and Michael in order to devote her attention to the pleasant pastime of plaguing Nicki, with the eager assistance of Mr. Moult. Delia slept, and Rupert drove like the wind, and Joanna and Owen Moult badgered the sulking Nicki, and all of them enjoyed themselves, not even excepting Nicki, who was always happier when he was the centre of attention, however malicious, than when people ignored him.

In the Alvis, Helen was doing her best to raise David's spirits. David was plunged in deep gloom, and the reason for this was quite obvious to Helen, who had noticed, ever since they had arrived in Salzburg, that Delia was paying very much less attention to David than was her custom, and very much more attention to Rupert. Helen attributed this change of attitude in

Delia to the fact that Rupert had emerged from his habitual retreat of aloofness and self-abstraction to a remarkable degree. He entered into the frivolous spirit of the place and the party; he talked, he discussed plans, he suggested expeditions, with surprising enthusiasm. Rupert, silent and aloof, had been an impressive figure but scarcely a companionable or obliging husband to anyone so charmingly helpless and happy-go-lucky as Delia. Rupert, conversational and energetic, exerting himself to be entertaining, buying tickets, supplying matches, arranging parties, left no room in the Temple-Cheyne *ménage* for the position of courier and consoler which David had occupied for so long. Delia had therefore dispensed imperceptibly with David's services, without even realizing that she had done so.

Helen approved strongly of this development, and she hoped that David would soon learn to appreciate his manumission from slavery. She liked David, but thought the worse of him for being so deplorably dependent upon Delia's favour. Delia, charming and affectionate creature though she undoubtedly was, had valued David's services in the varied capacities of escort, mechanic, travel-bureau, tobacconist, and Carter Paterson, far more highly than she had valued his patient devotion. Helen hoped that David's belated discovery of this aspect of Delia's character would be a salutary lesson to him. Helen had absorbed enough of her mother's theories to make her believe quite earnestly in women's rights, but they were the precise opposite of the rights which Delia exercised unconsciously and with such pardonable charm. Women, Helen felt, should

contend for their privileges—not that Delia contended for anything, her effortless success being the only annoying thing about her. The modern woman had the right to make her own plans, to light her own cigarettes, to carry her own parcels, and to live her own life. It was only the pre-war woman—and Delia—who liked to have all these things done for her, with the curious variant of preferring that her own life should be lived for her by as many other people as possible.

These were Helen's theories. In practice, she found it quite pleasant that David should stop the car in order to erect a side-screen for her when they reached a very dusty road. David, ostentatiously cherishing Delia, had appeared undignified and fussy, but when his consideration was directed to her own comfort, Helen was less disposed to condemn it. She thanked him very cordially, and felt in her bag for a cigarette. David's case was open and his lighter ready before she could produce one. To her own surprise, Helen found herself comparing this display of alacrity very favourably with Michael's habit of tossing a matchbox into her lap on the rare occasions when he noticed her need of it.

"I'm awfully glad, now, that I'm staying on at the Goldene Esel with you," said David. "The Villa party is getting on my nerves."

"I certainly don't care for the Baroness Birkendorf-Speed and her friends," Helen answered, pronouncing Alice's name with marked contempt. "I simply couldn't stand that old Italian with the eye-glass. He sat and stared at my legs, in the drawing-room just

now, until I had to spread a newspaper over them."

"No, did he? Damn his eyes!" said David indignantly. "I'll see he doesn't do that again—the old satyr." David's protective instincts were readily aroused, and he thought Helen's confession of her embarrassment in Venetia's drawing-room very endearing. "It's time somebody took proper care of this child," he thought, glancing quite affectionately at Helen, "particularly in a place like this, full of foreigners. It was a great mistake to let her come here alone with that rather oafish young prig Michael, who's probably not capable of looking after himself, even. However, now that I'm installed at the hotel instead, I can keep an eye on her and see that she's all right. Nice child. Most lovely complexion." He said aloud: "It's a good thing that I shall be at the Goldene Esel in future."

"It is, indeed," Helen replied earnestly. "I was so thankful when it was suggested that Michael should go to the Villa."

David's protective instincts asserted themselves even more strongly. "What? Not been annoying you, has he?" he demanded suspiciously.

Helen was horrified. "Good heavens, no! Michael has behaved *beautifully*. He would, of course. But I'm afraid it's been terribly difficult for him."

"I must say I can't see the difficulty," said David, who thought poorly of Michael on the whole, and still suspected that he must have annoyed Helen in some way.

Helen was irritated by this remark, and found her-

self hurrying into a confidence which she would have withheld had she reflected. "You see," she explained, rather indignantly, "Michael is—is very much in love with me."

"Good Lord! The puppy!" exclaimed David, with strong disapproval.

Helen was amazed. That Michael, who was a nice, sensible, well-educated young man could appear puppyish to anyone had never occurred to her. She was offended, but she was also decidedly shaken. Perhaps Michael might give some people the impression of being rather callow . . . he was certainly not a man of the world, compared with David . . . and she had had occasion to blush for him the night before, when he had arrived pompously intoxicated at the Goldene Esel. Perhaps, after all, there was something to be said for David's point of view. Nevertheless, Michael must be defended loyally. She said severely:

"You've no business to say that, David. You don't know how difficult it has been for Michael, and how wonderfully well he has behaved."

Ever since they had arrived at Salzburg, David had observed and resented Michael's humble but candid admiration of Delia. In view of this, he thought it unlikely that Michael was wildly in love with Helen. Alternatively, if he were really in love with Helen, then he had no business to sit in a café making sheep's eyes at Delia. Either way, David considered, it could scarcely be said that Michael had behaved wonderfully well. He said to Helen:

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, my dear, but

honestly I don't like the idea of your taking Michael seriously. I don't suppose you do, really. After all, you're worth twenty of that young ass, and I imagine you've got sense enough to realize it."

Helen considered this in silence. The great superiority of her moral worth compared with Michael's was a novel, but not unpleasing, notion. Hitherto she had assumed that Michael, as soon as he was free from the restraint imposed upon him by the fact that they shared an hotel, would declare his passion, and that in the natural sequence of events she would accept and return his devotion. This drama would not, of course, be followed by a formal engagement, because Michael's means would not permit of that for years. It would be followed, however, by what certain people deplorably—but most intelligibly—described as "an understanding." An understanding, after all, committed one to nothing in particular, and was a romantic and fairly elastic arrangement. Helen was not so cynical as to have put this aspect of the future to herself in so many words, but it had been present in the undercurrent of her mind. Now she began to consider, for the first time, the possibility of receiving Michael's declaration in a different spirit. Helen reflected that she was, after all, only twenty-four; and to bind herself at that age—even with so flimsy a tie as the contemplated "understanding"—seemed foolish, particularly in view of Michael's inferior moral worth. Perhaps it would be wiser to let Michael see that she appreciated his devotion very deeply and sincerely, but to convey to him, as tenderly as was compatible

with firmness, her inability at present to return it. "I could say to him," thought Helen, enjoying the prospect of this pathetic scene, "that I should want a long time to think it over. A very long time—months and months. He'd be dreadfully upset, of course—but still, it would be better than giving him *no* hope."

She had been silent for so long that David was afraid that he had offended her seriously. They arrived at the lake where the picnic was to take place, and when he had stopped the car, he turned to her and said:

"Are you furious with me, Helen? Please don't be—I only said what I did because I'd hate you to be miserable, as I'm quite sure you would be if you let yourself fall in love with Michael. Have you forgiven me?"

"Of course I have," Helen answered willingly, touched by David's concern for her future, and smiled at him very kindly.

"And you swear you'll turn down Michael good and hard if he gets fresh?" pursued David, who was quite surprised by his own eagerness in the matter.

Helen was slightly taken aback by this crude description of the heart-breaking conversation which she had contemplated, but, gazing into David's honest brown eyes, she was suddenly convinced of the justness of his views about Michael. If David said she was worth twenty of Michael, then either she was a paragon of all the virtues—"and that," thought Helen, who was a modest girl, "can't be entirely true"—

or else Michael was a fairly worthless wretch. In any case, she felt justified in returning David's steady gaze and saying, with a trace of emotion:

"Yes, David, I think I can promise you that."

"Good," said David, and took Helen's elbow in a protective grasp, as they advanced towards the rest of the party. Now that it was evident that Delia no longer needed cherishing, he had begun, automatically and almost unconsciously, to transfer his attentions to Helen in the matter of shielding her from harm, making plans for her pleasure, and surrounding her with *petits soins*. In fact, David's good sense, and his good right arm and his Speed Alvis, were already at her disposal. Helen was, in some ways, a more satisfactory person to cherish than Delia had been. She lacked, of course, Delia's adorable irresponsibility and helplessness, but she was less elusive. Delia was in many respects as helpless as an infant, and as irresponsible and as pig-headed as a moth; and, in addition, she was as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp. David reflected that no woman who combines these qualities is a really satisfactory object of devotion. Helen had just that spirit of independence which lent an added interest to the pleasant duty of taking care of her. David's grasp upon her elbow tightened as they approached their fellow picnickers.

Delia and Rupert were arguing earnestly about a water-fowl on the lake. Joanna and Owen Moult were chasing Nicki with merry cries. Nicki was flitting between the parked cars with faun-like grace and agility, tossing his long locks back from his forehead,

and uttering shrill, protesting noises. Alice Birkendorf-Speed was sitting on the running-board of her Rolls with a cigarette in one hand and a flask in the other, watching her protégé with genial contempt. Venetia was directing the unpacking of picnic-baskets. Michael, working ardently under her supervision, was so much absorbed that he scarcely noticed Helen when she came and stood beside him, until she offered to help.

"Give Miss Talbot a hand with the coffee-percolator," he suggested. "I don't think Wiggins is being much use—he seems to think it's a percussion instrument by the way he's handling it."

Helen chose to consider that this remark of Michael's indicated a touching anxiety not to claim her companionship, even over the prosaic business of unpacking a hamper. She glanced meaningly at David; and David interpreted her glance as an admission of the churlishness of Michael. He steered her away, leaving Michael to labour under Venetia's directions, and thus all of them were gratified in their several ways.

When they had bathed, and had been duly impressed by the superlative skill of Miss Talbot's diving, they basked in the sun, and consumed enormous quantities of the Viennese pastries, *zakowskis*, *café-crème*, and cocktails which Venetia had provided. Mr. Wiggins sat beside Miss Talbot and plied her with tit-bits. Miss Talbot disapproved heartily of the fare, which she thought both vulgar and indigestible, and longed secretly for jam sandwiches and strong tea in a thermos. Out of bravado, however, she refused nothing, partly in order to show that she was as familiar with Con-

tinental kickshaws as the next person, and partly in order to prove that her admirable figure, of which she was proud, was not the result of modern slimming methods. Mr. Wiggins, stimulated by two Singapore Slings, began to boast of his mountaineering skill, and was challenged by Michael to scale a small craggy eminence. Miss Talbot had eaten so much that she felt obliged to refuse to accompany the rest of the party. Eager to watch the contest, they all scrambled up the hillside, with the exception of Alice Birkendorf-Speed, who remained sitting cross-legged beside Miss Talbot, smoking peacefully through the cigarette-holder which projected like a signal-arm from her mouth, and varied in elevation from the horizontal to the acute angle when she spoke because she seldom troubled to remove it.

" Am I right," said Alice, turning amiably to Miss Talbot and keeping a firm hold on the cocktail-shaker, " in thinking that you've just gotten plighted to the guy with the Everest complex? If that's so, I reckon I've got to congratulate you."

Miss Talbot was opening her mouth to make an extremely severe reply, when she remembered just in time that in American the word " guy " could mean an individual, and not necessarily an object of ridicule. She hoped that " Everest complex " was also intended as a favourable description, and managed to smile politely as she answered:

" Not at all."

" Now when you say ' Not at all,' " pursued Alice comfortably, pronouncing the phrase so oddly that

Miss Talbot almost made a gesture of repudiation, "you don't mean what I'd mean. That's the funny thing about the English. If I said it, I'd mean 'You've gotten hold of the bum end of the bee, and that guy just doesn't amount to a hill of beans in my young life—see?' But when you say it, you mean 'I'm glad to have you congratulate me.'"

Miss Talbot writhed somewhat at this interpretation of her polite murmur, but she decided that Alice was the kind of alarming freak who ought to be humoured, so she replied kindly and a little coyly:

"We only announced our engagement to-day, you see, so I'm not really accustomed yet to being congratulated."

Alice sighed reminiscently. "Maybe I felt that way myself when I was going around with Speed," she said pensively, shifting the cigarette-holder to the other corner of her mouth and pouring more gin into the shaker. "I've been married about five times since then, and, believe me, after a while you kind of lose that fresh-daisy feeling. But the first time, why, you feel fine. I remember the folks in Mom's saloon at Los Angeles milling around and saying we were the finest couple they'd seen hitched. I was only seventeen when Speed sedooced me—but he was real good to me. He married me right away. Mom was after him with the ice-chopper, but he said it didn't make a mite of difference to him—he'd have married me, anyway. He was a wonderful man."

Alice, deep in her recollections of the past, did not notice Miss Talbot's ostentatious stiffening and expres-

sion of horror. She was thinking, as she filled her glass, of Hiram Speed, and of the good days in the saloon at Los Angeles. Towards her first seducer she remembered feeling nothing but gratitude—a lively sense of lovers to come. She was quite startled to hear Miss Talbot remark in icy tones:

"If you had already lost your virginity you can scarcely compare——"

"Why," interrupted Alice, with genuine surprise, "I can assure you, I didn't regard it as a *loss*."

"Really!" breathed Miss Talbot, completely defeated by the outrageous complacency and candour of Alice Birkendorf-Speed.

Alice, noticing that Miss Talbot seemed troubled, promptly diagnosed her frozen expression as being caused by thirst. With an exclamation of apology she filled the shaker from the bottles which stood at her right elbow, added some ice from the ice-box at her left elbow, and poured out a large cocktail with remarkable speed and dexterity. Handing the glass to Miss Talbot, she said:

"Talking of your ro-mance got me thinking about my first marriage, and I didn't notice a thing. I reckon I'm getting absent-minded. When you've finished that, you give me the glass right away and I'll fill it for you—don't wait to be asked. It's a mighty interesting thing to discuss—marriage—and we don't want any formality over a little thing like a cocktail. By the way, I don't think you told me your first name?"

"Louisa," said Miss Talbot faintly, and began to

drink a cocktail—a thing which she had never done before—out of sheer desperation.

"Now, listen, Louisa," Alice continued firmly, "the main thing about marriage——"

While Alice Birkendorf-Speed and Miss Talbot discussed marriage amid the picnic débris, David was agreeably engaged in succouring Helen. Half-way up the rocky, and in places precipitous, hillside which they were climbing, Helen had chosen a different route from that taken by the leaders of the party. David, anxious to see that she came to no harm, had followed her. To his alarm, when she was a few yards above him, she had lost her hand-hold, and then her head, in quick succession, and had slipped backwards accompanied by a shower of loose stones. He was at hand to arrest her progress, and bent over her, full of solicitude.

"Hurt?" he inquired, with terse concern.

"No," replied Helen, with what firmness she could muster. She was slightly winded and found utterance difficult.

"Don't get up," David commanded. "You may be. Move your right leg. Is that all right? Now the other. It was very silly of you to go this way—it's quite a difficult climb. You ought to have waited for me. Now stand up, and let's see if you are all right."

"I can't—for a minute," Helen murmured. "I feel a bit sick."

For some reason, David found this confession extra-

ordinarily disarming and endearing. He dropped on his knees upon the stony hillside and clasped her tightly in his arms.

Helen's response to this was to lay her cheek fondly against his and to whisper: "How *kind* you are, David."

"Kind!" echoed David, horrified to think that his gesture should be attributed to the chivalrous spirit which had, in fact, prompted it. "Nothing of the sort," he said emphatically, and found himself positively convinced by his own emphasis. "If you want to know, it's most important to me that you shouldn't hurt a single hair of your head, my sweet. Not even this rather ridiculous curl that grows behind your left ear." He twined, as he spoke, a tendril of Helen's fair hair round his finger, and then, to make his assurance more convincing to both of them, kissed the tip of the small, neat ear which it covered.

Helen immediately raised her face to his and said with deep emotion: "David, I never *dreamed* that you felt like that."

David was not at all sure what exactly she assumed that he was feeling. He made a determined effort, however, to feel it, and suddenly discovered that the effort was most enjoyable. The peach-like bloom of Helen's flawless and candid complexion six inches away was even more satisfactory than it had appeared from a greater distance. He found himself beginning to count the nice little freckles, minute pin-points of brown, which adorned her nose. Then it occurred to him that she seemed to be waiting for something. She

was still looking up at him expectantly, her eyes fixed trustfully on his. Obligingly, he kissed her.

It was when they were about half-way down the hill that David realized that he was engaged to Helen. How this had come about was a mystery which baffled him. He was convinced in his own mind that he had not uttered a word which could be construed as a proposal of marriage by even the most determined harpy. Since Helen, with her shining simplicity of character and her careful upbringing, was the very reverse of a harpy, he was at a loss to account for this unexpected development. He felt bewildered, but pleased. The more accustomed he became to the idea, the more it appealed to him. Helen was, in all respects, the type of girl whom he would have wished to marry had the notion of marrying anyone ever occurred to him. He began to wonder why he had lavished so many years of diligent devotion upon someone else's wife, when all the time he might have been enjoying the exquisitely proprietary sensations which he now felt towards the charming creature whose hand he held as he steered her down the hill. Helen was merry, but sedate; sensible, and yet not obstinate; and if she were inclined to have rather definite opinions—well, she was very young, and a little wilfulness in young women was always engaging. Besides, it made it all the more imperative that she should be taken care of and sheltered from the consequences of her wilfulness until she had outgrown it.

"Darling," he said firmly, "no more nonsense about that young ass, Michael."

Helen remembered Michael with a start of delightful contrition. To have broken one heart and captured another was almost too much excitement in one short holiday. It was positively ageing.

"It's going to be very difficult to tell him——" she began.

"I'll tell him. Don't you worry," David said with determination.

"But, darling, we can't tell anyone till we've told my father and mother," Helen protested.

"Then we'll send them a wire at once, and tell the others directly afterwards. I'm not going to have you exposed to any more of this business of being badgered by Michael and ogled by obscene Italians. Look out, my sweet, that's a marshy place—we can't have you getting those small feet wet."

He picked her up and deposited her carefully on the other side of a narrow stream which crossed their path. Helen, who could have jumped it very well unaided, was surprised to find how much she enjoyed being lifted across it. She forgot, in her pleasure, to remind David that he was wrong in supposing that she had been badgered by Michael. She was beginning to feel so much like Messalina that it scarcely seemed worth while to contradict anything which people might choose to infer as the consequences of her fatal charm.

CHAPTER XV

LATE that evening at the Villa, Venetia and Delia sat in Venetia's bedroom, which was a riot of rose-wreaths and gilded *putti* and pink tassels, and discussed the events of the day. Venetia had just finished pacifying the Heir, who had been heard screaming loudly in spite of his nurse's efforts to soothe him. Venetia, swooping into the nursery, had snatched the Heir from his cot, and informed the nurse in no uncertain terms that unless she ceased from sighing for Jerusalem her happy home would no longer be in Queen Anne's Gate. She had then given the Heir a spoonful of honey and invited him to listen to a record from *Private Lives*. The result was magical. The Heir had beamed benignly upon everyone, and had fallen asleep almost instantly, his cheek pillowed confidingly against the vast diamond clip on Venetia's left shoulder. He had then suffered himself to be returned to his cot without demur. Venetia, admonishing the nurse to curb her passion for Paradise and get some sleep while the going was good, had retired to her room with Delia for a final glass of gin-and-lime and a little peaceful gossip. She explained to Delia that she always used the same means to pacify the Heir, because nobody could scream with their mouth full of honey, or listen to the record from *Private Lives* without

a gratifying sensation of smugness and well-being.

Delia listened absently. She was wondering if Rupert would like an heir, and whether it was time that they moved from the doll's house in Bourdon Street into a house of more sensible proportions, and if Makepeace would keep a supply of records from *Private Lives* and the best honey and produce them placidly on a tray whenever they were needed. She roused herself from this pleasant reverie as she heard Venetia say:

"I think it's an admirable arrangement—Helen and David—don't you? "

" Perfect," agreed Delia. " Rupert and I were saying only the other day that David ought to marry some nice young thing. Only we never thought of Helen."

"What surprises me is that David thought of Helen," Venetia said. " You'll miss him about the house."

"Terribly. But I'm really awfully glad for his sake that he's going to marry Helen. Of course in a way I'm a little depressed. You know how one always is."

" Oh, always." Venetia thoroughly appreciated Delia's feelings. " I'm constantly being plunged in gloom when I read the engagements column in *The Times*. But it soon wears off, and then there's the exquisite pleasure of watching them domineer over their young women in a way they never dared to attempt with us. And it's so funny going to their first dinner-party and noticing the pains they've taken

to display one's wedding-present prominently. I always give my ex-young-men very blatant baroque clocks—squiggly ones, all gilt—and then I can enjoy their wives' efforts to reconcile them with drawing-rooms furnished entirely from Heal's in limed oak and chintz."

"What tiresome girls they must marry," said Delia.

"They do. That's what makes it so sad. It's reaction, I suppose, from the hellish treatment they've had from us—being kept waiting in restaurants and put off at the last minute, and having their cars and their horses borrowed, and getting no thanks except an occasional cocktail and a kind word. No wonder they get disheartened in the end, and crave for chintz and cosiness and punctual meals."

"Venetia," said Delia in surprise, "you're developing a conscience. It's not like you at all. You never used to feel this compassion for your young men."

"Oh, yes I did," Venetia answered cheerfully. "I always knew what they were feeling, poor lambs. I still do. It doesn't make any difference, but I think it's more satisfactory to know what you're at, instead of drifting blissfully as you do, buoyed up by a sort of vague notion that any young man must be perfectly happy waiting for one for half an hour in a ticking taxi, because if he weren't he wouldn't do it."

"Darling, I think you're being a little morbid," said Delia reproachfully. "Besides, David did enjoy it. He was only miserable when he wasn't allowed to be helpful. If I made the least attempt, ever, to prevent him fetching me in his car, or waiting for

me, or taking me to some party I knew he'd dislike, he was so pathetic about it that I simply gave in rather than hurt his feelings."

Venetia smiled. "And when David plays for sympathy, he plays four aces and the joker every single time. Well, he'll have pretty fair hell with the Garland girl, I expect. Judging from what she said in the café this morning about women's rights she'll probably take him to far worse parties than you ever did, and give him regular diet-planned meals and plenty of good advice. It'll be an abrupt change from 'the occasional cocktail and kind word' as a reward."

"I do hope," said Delia earnestly, "that she'll make him happy."

"Have a drink, and don't be wistful, for God's sake," said Venetia.

Helen, with David's collaboration, had sent a telegram to her parents saying:

David Herald and I are engaged do please wire approval and blessing.

Helen knew that her mother would consider it a ridiculous concession to convention if she were to ask for her parents' consent, and so she had expended a few extra Groschen on the words "and blessing" as a sop to her father, whose views on filial duty, in so far as they existed, were somewhat Victorian. He had, in fact, few views on any subject except that of Egyptian papyri, so it seemed safe to assume that he would leave the details of consenting to his daughter's engagement, as he left every other detail, to his alarmingly capable

wife. Helen was, therefore, greatly surprised to receive on the following morning this telegram:

Approval and blessings herewith. Mother follows.
Father.

She showed it in amazement to David, who said: "Must be a misprint for 'letter.' These foreign post offices——"

"But you don't know my father," Helen pointed out. "Nothing in this world would induce him to send a telegram himself if Mother were there to do it. And you do know my mother, so you know that nothing would induce her to send a telegram and sign it only 'Father.'"

"Perhaps in the excitement of the moment she forgot to add 'and Mother,'" David suggested.

"Not very likely, darling. You know what a business-like person Mother is."

David sighed. He did know, only too well, the sickening efficiency of Mrs. Garland. David disapproved very strongly of efficient women—with the exception of Helen, whose earnest determination to be practical was engaging, and in view of her youth, curable—and the prospect of Mrs. Garland as a mother-in-law seemed to him to be the only drawback to his engagement. Looking at Helen, however, as she stood in the hall of the Goldene Esel puzzling over the telegram, a slight pucker on her candid, freckled brow, he forgot the menace of the mother in his delight in the presence of the daughter. He put his arm round her and said:

"Don't let's worry about anything. I have an idea that you would look rather enchanting in one of those absurd local hats with a cocky little feather in it. Let's go out and buy one at once."

They were not to be allowed to forget Mrs. Garland for long. As they were leaving the hotel they were pursued by Frau Hofer, panting, who announced that a lady wished to speak on the telephone to the Fräulein. Helen, assuming that it must be Delia or Joanna, accompanied Frau Hofer into the office where the telephone stood. She emerged a few moments later looking more astonished than ever, and informed David that her mother was in Munich.

"Munich!" echoed David, equally amazed.

"She's flown there. She's coming on by train, and wants us to meet her at the station. She said the train arrives at fifteen-thirty. And she wants me to book her a room here."

"But why?" In the midst of his bewilderment at this news David reflected that it was typical of Mrs. Garland to say "fifteen-thirty," when "half-past three" was good enough for any ordinary English man or woman.

"I can't think," answered Helen. "She was very nice about our engagement—said how pleased she was —and then she said, 'Now that you are engaged, of course it alters everything, and so I've come out to be with you.' What do you suppose that means?"

"God knows," said David gloomily. "You'd better ask for a room." villian in "Regal"

Helen returned to Frau Hofer, who was obviously

deeply interested in the turn of events which had resulted in the substitution of David for Michael, and evidently in some doubt as to whom to congratulate or to console. Helen explained that she wished to reserve a room for her mother, who was arriving that afternoon. Frau Hofer's toad-like countenance immediately expressed volumes of obscene sympathy.

"It is perhaps a shock for the Fräulein—yes? It is unexpected—*so*. But a mother is always anxious for her daughter. *Ach*, I remember my good mother, how she guarded me—as you say in English, poked the nose into my own business. It is very hard for a young lady."

Helen blushed with annoyance, and said indignantly: "I am delighted, naturally, that my mother is coming here to join us."

"*So? Natürlich.*" There was no mistaking Frau Hofer's wink. "And here in the Goldene Esel we are discreet. We talk a little to our visitors about the Festspiel, perhaps, and about our beautiful Salzburg, but we never speak about one visitor to the other one. To poke the nose, and to talk gossip—that cannot happen at the Goldene Esel. It is best—and so the visitor feels quite free and happy, and has no anxiety."

To Helen's extreme annoyance, Frau Hofer had the effrontery to pat her reassuringly on the shoulder, as she added:

"I go now to prepare a nice room for Frau Garland."

Helen resented Frau Hofer's attitude so much that she could not bring herself to confide her grievance to David, who she felt might complicate matters still further by insulting the old woman and attacking

Michael. David attributed her pensive air to a natural despondency at the prospect of Mrs. Garland's arrival, and with this he sympathized greatly. He suggested that they should have a drink at the Café Tomaselli.

Rupert, Delia, Joanna, Miss Talbot and Mr. Wiggins were already at the café when they arrived there. They were expecting Venetia and Michael, who were shopping in the Bentley. Helen thought how wise it was of Michael to busy himself with being helpful to his hostess in order to take his mind off his grief. Michael had shown remarkably little grief on the previous evening when informed of her engagement to David, and had congratulated them both with positive exuberance, but Helen had naturally assumed that this was further evidence of his superb self-control. Finding herself next to Joanna, she told her, under cover of the general conversation, about Frau Hofer's wicked insinuations and unshakable determination to conceal a non-existent scandal. Joanna looked envious.

"Some people have all the luck," she said in an aggrieved undertone. "I'm sure I always behave far worse than you do, and nobody has ever accused me of being disreputable."

"But it wasn't an accusation," Helen murmured back. "The horrible old woman made it sound somehow complimentary."

"Of course. That's what's so nice. And considering that Michael did a complete Joseph on you——"

"What do you mean—did a 'Joseph'?" Helen demanded.

"Well, he did, Helen—you can't deny that he shot

off to the Villa like a scared rabbit and left the coast clear for David. Naturally the old woman respects you —she thinks you have such a string of lovers that there's a new one on the roster every week. She little knows what a clean-living young viper from the sixth form at St. Pryska's she's really been harbouring in her bosom."

Deeply offended with her friend, Helen turned away and addressed Miss Talbot.

"My mother's arriving this afternoon," she said. "I'm sure she's looking forward to meeting you again. She suddenly decided to come out here when she heard of our engagement."

"Really!" said Miss Talbot, delighted. "I *shall* be glad to see her. And so you've really been engaged all the time? I must admit that I always guessed it."

David looked astonished, and Helen realized, much to her confusion, that Miss Talbot thought she was engaged to Michael. She said firmly:

"David and I became engaged yesterday."

Miss Talbot looked at David, who sat smiling complacently, and at Helen, who was blushing. She sighed and said:

"I don't believe I shall ever understand the modern girl."

"But Helen's not a modern girl," protested Joanna.

"Thank God she's not," David said with a spiteful glance in Joanna's direction, "if it means changing your mind every ten minutes and being a cross between a kitten and a parakeet. Personally I'm grateful for a little old-fashioned common sense when I come across it."

This speech delighted Helen, failed to snub Joanna, and gave rise to curiously different reflections in Delia and Miss Talbot. Delia was wondering if it was the clue to David's abrupt desertion of her. She supposed, regretfully, that during the two years in which he had been her closest companion he could scarcely have come across a trace of old-fashioned common sense in her. "But one can't please everyone," she thought, "and Rupert does so much dislike common sense, and I should imagine that the more old-fashioned it was, the worse he'd hate it. On the whole, it's very fortunate that I haven't any."

She turned and smiled at Rupert, who said vaguely, "How nice of you to wear a blue hat," and gave her a cigarette. She felt perfectly happy.

Miss Talbot's troubled mind was busy with David's statement, and the inference which she drew from it was that Helen had concealed from him her outrageous *affaire* with Michael. Miss Talbot was shocked, but in some obscure way she felt agreeably conspiratorial. Since her own surprising betrothal to Mr. Wiggins she believed earnestly that everything possible should be done to promote the peace and happiness of engaged couples. "After all," thought Miss Talbot, with a sentimental sigh of which she would not have believed herself capable, "it's too late for Rachel Garland to appreciate the dear girl's feelings—but it's not too late for me. And of course there are so many things which a man can't understand, and which are better kept from him." Instinctively she ranged herself on Helen's side against the possible disapprobation of Mrs. Garland and

David. There were certain things which she considered that Mr. Wiggins would not understand and which she intended to keep from him—for instance, the fact that during the Suffragette agitation she had refused to pay a fine and had served a week's imprisonment for resisting arrest. It was true that she had resisted it with immense dignity, but she felt sure that Mr. Wiggins would almost certainly deplore the whole business: and if Rachel Garland appeared and started talking about it—— "Helen and I," thought Miss Talbot, glowing with conspiratorial zest, "must have an alliance. She must prevent her mother mentioning my militant activities, and I will engage to forget all about Michael."

Mr. Wiggins had been greatly surprised to hear of Helen's engagement to David. He had a sudden recollection of Michael's melancholy and repeated references to some private sorrow while they were drinking beer after the opera and walking home. "Poor lad," thought Mr. Wiggins compassionately, "that was it, no doubt. He always seemed rather offhand in his manner to her, but I suppose that's the way of young people nowadays. Well, he's young, and he'll get over it. I must give him a word of sympathy if I can get him alone."

Just then Venetia and Michael arrived in the Bentley, which was full of parcels. They appeared to be in high spirits. Michael flung down his hat and cried exuberantly:

"This is the loveliest and most absurd town in Europe. I've just bought a glorious garment called an

auto-mantel which cost twelve Schillings and is a gigantic white linen overcoat, if you'll believe me—and now I'll buy you all some more beer."

"He's wonderfully brave," thought Helen with a lump in her throat; "and it's all for my sake."

"Good lad," thought Mr. Wiggins. "He carries it off very well."

"Heartless wretch," thought Miss Talbot.

"Silly young ass," thought David.

"Michael's quite fun, really," thought Joanna, and beckoned to him to come and sit beside her.

When the party broke up Miss Talbot drew Helen aside and murmured: "I just wanted to tell you that you can rely on me—and of course on Edward—absolutely."

"It's—it's most kind of you," said Helen, bewildered.

"It's the least I can do," Miss Talbot said warmly. "I mean, of course, about your—er—other young man, Michael. I assure you I've forgotten the whole affair. It will never be mentioned."

"Oh, but, please," Helen protested, much embarrassed. "I don't want you to think——"

"I don't think about it at all," said Miss Talbot, in earnest and reassuring tones. "After all, in a place like this—and we're only young once——" She broke off, overcome by the realization that she herself was being young only once, and that was in her forty-fifth year. She added: "And in return I want you to do something for me. I don't want your mother to mention my militant activities before Edward. Men

never really understand, you know—and even a very slight misunderstanding would be so distressing—don't you think, just at the moment—I mean when one is so recently engaged. You feel the same, my dear, I've no doubt about Mr. Herald and the—er—*affaire* with Michael. But, as I've told you, I've put that completely out of my head, and I know I can rely upon you to—well, to guide the conversation away from dangerous topics, too."

Miss Talbot left Helen staring helplessly after her as she departed. Helen was beginning to feel that perhaps she had really behaved disgracefully in some way which she was incapable of comprehending, and that, in the circumstances, it was kind of everyone to be so eager in offering to shield her. The monstrous similarity between Frau Hofer's suggestions and Miss Talbot's—in spite of the fact that Frau Hofer's had been accompanied by abominable winks and leers while Miss Talbot's had been uttered with every circumstance of nice feeling and good taste—was beginning to have its effect upon Helen. Seeing David approach, she gave herself a slight shake.

"Very well," she thought, "if everyone insists on believing that I'm living down an awful past, I suppose I'd better get used to the idea myself."

She went to meet David in a mood of unusual gaiety.

While Miss Talbot had been talking to Helen in a corner of the Café Tomaselli, Mr. Wiggins had drawn Michael aside into another corner.

"My dear boy," he said very kindly, "I'm an

elderly and obtuse person, and the meaning of what you said to me when we parted the other night has only just dawned upon me."

"What did I say?" asked Michael, remembering that he had drunk a great quantity of beer on that occasion, and realizing with alarm that he might have said anything.

"You were talking," said Mr. Wiggins, "in a way which—I confess it now—baffled me, of your own misfortunes, and you spoke very generously of your pleasure in my prospects of happiness. Very generously indeed. It was good of you, Michael. In fact, I feel, now that my own hopes are realized and yours are, as you feared, disappointed, that really I ought not to mention it."

"If you mean Helen and David——" began Michael, and was conscious that his voice sounded almost hysterical.

"I do," said Mr. Wiggins with grave sympathy. "And let me tell you, my boy, I admire the way you've carried it off immensely. It's a very great credit to you. If you'll forgive a word of advice from a man who has found real happiness when he'd given up hope of it—there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it—and *better*."

"I don't doubt it," cried Michael wildly. "Bigger and better fish——" and dashed off to board the Bentley as Venetia was letting in the clutch.

"Poor boy," thought Mr. Wiggins commiseratingly. "But he'll get over it." He hurried away to find Miss Talbot.

Helen and David lunched together at the Stieglbrau. They sat at a table on the terrace, looking across the domes and spires of the town to the Kapuzinerberg, and Helen was buoyed up by the consciousness that she must live down her shocking past. David thought that she had never been so gay and so attractive. He assumed that it was something in himself which drew forth this part of Helen's character, and he glowed with pride and pleasure. When they had finished luncheon, they descended into the town again and David took Helen into the most superior shop he could find and bought her a hat. The shop assistant, an obsequious young man who spoke fluent English, insisted on taking the view that David was a rich protector pandering to a whim of his inamorata. It was to David and not to Helen that he showed the hats, and to David that he explained how becoming they were and how elegant. David was at first embarrassed, but soon he began to enjoy himself. It was a novel situation. He had never been allowed to buy anything for Delia except *marrons glacés* and cigarettes, and in any case she had always remained outside in the car or the taxi while he bought them, so that the experience of buying hats for an attractive and blushing young woman was a new one. He entered heartily into the spirit of the game, criticizing the angle of the feather and the roll of the brim, and asking Helen to hold her head on one side in order that he might judge of the effect.

Helen's embarrassment at first was greater than David's. She reminded herself quickly that she had

lost her character already, and that she had better resign herself to experiences of this kind. Cheered by this reflection, she played her part very well, and emerged from the shop on David's arm wearing over one eye an extremely small black hat adorned with a remarkably tall pheasant's feather. She said to David as they walked down the street:

"I must be going mad. I've always disapproved of Joanna's tiny little absurd hats, and I disapproved terribly of Michael when he bought an Austrian hat, and said it was fancy dress—and here I am wearing this hat and enjoying it."

"If it's madness," said David fondly, "let's forget sanity."

Still wearing her hat with its astounding feather, Helen greeted her mother as she alighted from the Munich train. David waited self-consciously in the background with a porter.

"My dear," said Mrs. Garland, "what a journey! I did think Hitler would have made the trains punctual—but not a bit of it. This one started nine minutes late and lost four minutes on the way. However, I had a most interesting discussion about German female civil servants with a very sensible woman in my compartment, so the time wasn't entirely wasted. That's a very becoming hat, Helen. You're quite right to pay more attention to your appearance now that you're engaged. It's a duty which every sensible woman realizes. I'm so glad it's David—I always liked him. Of course, I started from home the moment I heard about it. It's one thing to stay alone in an hotel with

Michael, but quite another thing when you're engaged to David."

"As a matter of fact, Michael has given up his room to David and gone somewhere else," said Helen, when she could get in a word; "so now it's David and I who are at the Goldene Esel."

"But that's much worse!" cried Mrs. Garland energetically. "At your age, of course, you never think of these things. I never did myself when I was young—luckily I married your father before I did anything really indiscreet. What a good thing it is that I came at once. Ah, here's David! You must accept a mother's congratulations. . . ."

Helen wondered, as Mrs. Garland greeted David, if her mother had perhaps been cornered as she herself had been in her efforts to be a pioneer for women's freedom from convention, and had been driven to accept the prevailing opinion that she had lost her character and had better join in the general conspiracy to make light of the loss. That would account, Helen thought, for Mrs. Garland's occasional references to her startling past, when everyone knew that she had done nothing except to be an exemplary undergraduate, an exemplary wife, and an armchair exponent of Women's Emancipation. Helen hoped that her mother had enjoyed living down her non-existent past as much as she herself enjoyed the prospect of living up to her own.

. . . . . .

There are three bridges over the river Salzach at Salzburg. Late that night Delia and Rupert Temple-

Cheyne stood on one of them talking earnestly. Delia was saying:

"I thought perhaps that if we moved to one of those adorable houses in St. Leonard's Terrace——"

"My sweet, of course," Rupert answered in his vague, familiar tones that were somehow a little more personal to-night. "We can afford it, easily. It didn't occur to me to suggest moving from Bourdon Street until you wanted to. You see, I never notice where we live really, so long as you're there, and Make-peace . . . but chiefly you. . . ."

At the other end of the same bridge David and Helen were standing. They had no idea that Delia and Rupert were there, and if they had known they would not have cared very much. They were looking at the stars.

On the middle bridge, which is the one frequented by people crossing from one half of the town to the other, Alice Birkendorf-Speed strolled arm-in-arm with Nicki von Schwarzach. They were not looking at the stars, because Nicki was not interested in them, and because when Alice looked up at the starry firmament she always thought of Hatton Garden and that made her feel dissatisfied. So she looked at Nicki instead, and remarked:

"I'm thinking of going back to the States next week, Nicki. I'm about through with this burg, and I reckon I shan't want you with me. You wouldn't look right on Fifth Avenue. So you'd better start looking around."

"Alice, don't be so *cruel*," protested Nicki, clutching at his hair with the hand which bore the emerald ring. "I shan't know where to *turn* when you're gone."

"Well," said Alice amiably, "at least you won't be able to turn on me."

Venetia and Michael were leaning on the parapet of the third bridge, which was deserted but for them. They were looking for the reflection of the stars in the water. Michael maintained that the glitter on the Salzach was reflected starlight, and Venetia said that as far as she was concerned she thought it was the effect of mixed drinks on the liver. Michael chose to ignore this, and pointed out that in a week's time they would all have left Salzburg and that then there would be no more starlight reflected in a dark torrent, and no more dreams beneath the shadow of the towering fortress. He felt delightfully sorrowful, and quoted:

> "Partir, c'est mourir un peu. . . .
> Et c'est son âme que l'on sème,
> Que l'on sème à chaque adieu:
> Partir, c'est mourir un peu."

"Never mind, darling," said Venetia consolingly. "No matter how much of your soul you scatter at partings, I'm quite sure that you'll always have quantities left."

THE END